PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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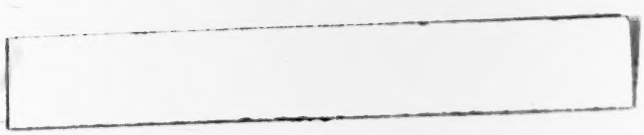
HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1996–97

COMPRISING PERIOD
10 February—20 February 1997



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10 February 1997

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 290**

SEVENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1996–97

House of Commons

Monday 10 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Bicycles (Rail Carriage)

1. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received concerning the transit of bicycles on trains; and if he will make a statement. [13344]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): Representations have been made recently to my Department and to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising about the carriage of bicycles on trains. I am very encouraged that franchisees are being ever more responsive to cyclists' needs, simply because they want more people travelling by train.

Mr. Barnes: Is it not a good idea for cyclists to make use of the railway? I understand that the Secretary of State has an honourable record on this in connection with work that he produced when he was a Back Bencher, which involved my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). However, has not a new situation arisen with the railways' fragmentation? It has presented many blocks and problems, so that information to cyclists about moving throughout the system is difficult to obtain. Pre-booking is beginning to be required. There is the costs problem and there is no official monitoring of cyclists' problems. Perhaps it is time for the Secretary of State to get on his bike and sort those things out.

Sir George Young: The Secretary of State never got off his bike. It is true that, in the 1970s, some hon. Members, including my predecessor as Member of Parliament for Acton, and I launched initiatives to make it easier for people to carry their bicycles on trains, and I think that we achieved modest success. I am happy to say that, since privatisation, there are signs that the new system is even more cycle-friendly. For example, at Paddington, a station that I use regularly, there are now many cycle racks. Franchise operators that order new rolling stock are making provision for bicycles. Great Western Railway has tripled the capacity of its high-speed trains to carry bicycles; the franchising director has invited franchisees to make it clear, when they bid, what they propose to do for cyclists; and the regulator has a role to play in ensuring that any charges are reasonable—so a brighter dawn is before those of us who like to carry our bicycle on the train.

Mr. Waller: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the routes from Bradford and Leeds to the Yorkshire dales, particularly Airedale and Wharfedale, are among those that are of particular value to cyclists? Does he agree that it is therefore particularly good news for cyclists and visitors to the dales that the franchising director has today awarded the franchise for the service on those two lines to MTL Rail Ltd? Would it not be good to ensure that the new electric multiple units, which replace the existing class 308 rolling stock, have adequate space for cycles and for equipment carried by walkers?

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has reminded the House of what is happening throughout Britain: where a new franchise is let, provision is often made, through either refurbishment or the introduction of new rolling stock. I am anxious that, when

rolling stock is refurbished or new rolling stock ordered, adequate provision should be made for the bicycle. My Department recently funded the cyclists public affairs group, which is known to my hon. Friend, to draft the "Bikes and Trains" publication, which identifies opportunities for new operators and explains how they can broaden the market base by making it easier for cyclists to travel by train.

Mrs. Wise: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that in many cases new rolling stock has no physical capacity to carry bicycles at all? Would not the simplest, most efficient and most effective thing for him to do simply be to make it obligatory for all trains to have adequate space to carry bicycles?

Sir George Young: That is what is happening. Connex will introduce new stock on the south-eastern network which makes provision for the carriage of cycles. For Anglia, GB Railways is committed to ordering a number of new trains that must have space for the carriage of at least four cycles. The new operators are introducing rolling stock that will make it easier for people to put their bikes on trains.

Fatal Accidents (M180-A180)

2. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatalities attributable to drivers falling asleep at the wheel there have been on the M180-A180 since it was opened. [13345]

The Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John Bowis): Such information is not normally collected by central Government, but I understand that Loughborough university carried out a study of accidents on this route over a one-year period. In that time, there were four fatalities, resulting from accidents that were related to driver fatigue.

Mr. Brown: I am glad that my hon. Friend has had the opportunity of seeing the Loughborough university study. Will he confirm that the case put by Professor Jim Horne in the report—I hope that my hon. Friend has a copy—is that there is clear evidence that if one travels in an easterly direction, particularly on the A180 towards Grimsby, accidents or fatalities may be caused by the fact that the road has certain conditions that cause drivers to go to sleep? Will my hon. Friend consider introducing a national study using Professor Jim Horne's work in the report?

Mr. Bowis: I have seen the report to which my hon. Friend refers. It shows that the accident record of the A180 is lower than the average for that sort of road, but rather higher in terms of the number of accidents involving driver fatigue while travelling in an easterly direction towards the docks. That may have something to do with the nature of the road, the length of the journey or people not complying with the advice in the highway code. I will certainly draw the attention of the Highways Agency to the matter. A national study looking at counter-measures to combat tiredness is being conducted by the same Loughborough university team, which will take on board the points raised by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Dalyell: As one who has been in close contact with Jim Horne for three years regarding two constituency cases and his sleep laboratory, may I ask whether his funding is thought to be adequate? Will the Government interest themselves in the proposed closure of the sleep apnoea laboratory run by Neil Douglas in Edinburgh, as the two work closely together?

Mr. Bowis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising both those points. We keep closely in touch with centres of excellence in research, and the main research has been commissioned through the Transport Research Laboratory. The work started in 1992, and we expect the finished report in April this year. It certainly will be interesting to see what comes of that work. I am not aware that funding has been a problem, but I will certainly look into it.

Parking Restrictions

3. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking with regard to the enforcement of parking restrictions. [13346]

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): In general, enforcement of parking restrictions outside London is a matter for the police. Under the Road Traffic Act 1991, local authorities may take over responsibility for on-street parking enforcement from the police on a decriminalised basis. The transfer has been a success in London, and we welcome applications from authorities elsewhere.

Sir Irvine Patnick: What steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that proper consultation takes place between authorities and local residents? In two areas in my constituency—Crookes and Abbeydale—little consultation appears to have taken place before the introduction of parking restrictions and road alterations, although consultation is now taking place. That cannot be the right way to function—or can it?

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is right: proper consultation with a view to building a consensus is important, and the Government guidelines require authorities to review all their existing restrictions before taking on enforcement to ensure that restrictions are used only where genuinely necessary.

Mr. Tony Banks: Parking restrictions in London—particularly central London—are a joke. Some local authorities are enforcing and some are not. Of those that are enforcing, some are using it as a fund-raising exercise, rather than the sensible application of regulations. There are people parking on double yellow lines who put on their hazard warning lights and think that they have dematerialised. It is time that the police stepped in and took more effective action, instead of zooming around London in large vans keeping their helmets dry. They should do something about enforcing proper parking restrictions in London so that public and private transport can move easily.

Mr. Watts: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should take up his complaints with Labour London authorities which chose to have the powers of parking enforcement. As he should know, the police are responsible for enforcement

on red routes in London, but local authorities enforce everywhere else. I suggest that he talk to some of his Labour party colleagues about their deficiencies.

Mr. Brooke: Will my hon. Friend accept that in the past 20 years—thanks to the changes the Government have made in London—the number of free metered parking spaces in Westminster at any one time has gone up from 5 to 30 per cent., not only making it easier for motorists to find space, but reducing traffic and pollution by a compensating amount?

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend makes an important point in his inimitable way.

Private Finance Initiative

4. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress is being made with PFI projects in his Department. [13348]

Sir George Young: My Department has made excellent progress with the private finance initiative and continues to take the lead: PFI is delivering substantial investment in transport infrastructure of more than £3.7 billion over the next three years.

Mr. Arnold: My right hon. Friend will be aware that, in many ways, north-west Kent is the epicentre of the private finance initiative. Not only do we have the leading hospital PFI at Darenth Park, but we have the channel tunnel rail link. Given both those projects and many others, does my right hon. Friend agree that the PFI presents magnificent opportunities for our transport infrastructure?

Sir George Young: The Government have worked up the private finance initiative and it is successful across the range of Government Departments. My Department has played a significant part in that the bulk of the deals have come from the Department of Transport. My hon. Friend mentioned the channel tunnel rail link and, as he knows, London and Continental Railways was appointed last February. It took over European Passenger Services and intends to achieve its main project financing and flotation by late 1997 or early 1998. The PFI also has applications for the London underground, roads and civil aviation—it has a lot of potential left.

Mr. Gunnell: The Secretary of State will know that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, when speaking to the Leeds chamber of commerce on the last day of January, mentioned the go-ahead for the Leeds supertram. What private sector contributions have been made to that project? Can the Secretary of State give more details of the reality behind the Chancellor's comments? Can he assure the House that there will be a start in obtaining funding for that scheme in advance of the need for fresh parliamentary provision to pursue it?

Sir George Young: I was in Leeds recently and I took the opportunity to talk to representatives of the local authority and others about the Leeds supertram. It is an important project. The difficulty at the moment is that the amount of private sector contribution is not as high as the sponsors would have liked. If we are to make progress with the scheme, which has potential, it is important to drive up the private sector contribution so that the project becomes more affordable within my Department's baseline. I am conscious of the deadline in the relevant legislation.

Mr. Mans: Bearing in mind the reports over the weekend about the franchising of the west coast main line, can my right hon. Friend say when we may expect a formal announcement, instead of information being leaked out through the press?

Sir George Young: The Director of Passenger Rail Franchising announced on Friday night that a preferred bidder had been identified. I hope that that deal will be finalised in the next few weeks; we will then see whether the benefits of franchising that we have seen in the rest of the country can be extended to that most important line.

Mr. Andrew Smith: If private finance is serving transport so well, will the Secretary of State tell us why he will not bring forward proper public-private partnerships for the London underground to attract investment now, in place of the running farce of his privatisation plans, which would sell public assets cheap and mean no new investment for years?

Sir George Young: The whole House knows the Labour party's policy on privatisation—the Labour party is against it until it happens and then conveniently forgets about it.

On private finance, the hon. Gentleman must know that we are pursuing with London Underground a range of private finance deals—my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London rightly reminds us about the Northern line trains on every occasion. The three other major projects are power supplies, an upgraded ticketing system and the communications network—some £500 million of private finance initiative. It is therefore not the case that the Government are not driving that forward with the underground.

Mr. Bill Walker: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the pleasure felt in Scotland at the announcement of the PFI projects for the air traffic control centres. When is the second centre likely to go ahead?

Sir George Young: The bids are still being discussed and, following consultation with the airlines, we expect to be in a position to announce the outcome in March.

London Transport (Finance)

5. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from London Transport on the potential consequences of the Government's reduction in funding for London Transport for the financial year 1997–98. [13349]

Mr. Bowis: There has been no reduction in planned Government funding for London Transport's core business or for the Jubilee line extension for the financial year 1997–98.

Mr. Hughes: If there is to be no reduction in funding, why is London Transport suddenly making it clear that at

its meeting later this week it may well say, for example, that the east London line cannot open again for two years and that it will have to stop some of the major works programmes that are scheduled in its budget? Will the Minister give a direct answer to the question that the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) asked the Secretary of State? Why does he not listen to the one representation above all others made clear by the chairman of London Transport—that all London Transport wants is to be allowed to borrow from the private sector? It does not want to be privatised and does not mind who owns London Underground, but wants to be able to have public and private money and to be allowed to get on with the job.

Mr. Bowis: That, of course, is precisely what it is getting. It is astonishing that all that the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who speaks for the Labour party, can do is criticise every time we invite and encourage private sector money to come into the underground system. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) ought to know better than to peddle rumours on what may or may not be decided at some future meeting, when he knows perfectly well that, if he starts to talk up the possibility of services being delayed, the people who will be worried are his constituents.

The hon. Gentleman knows that I walked the course of the tunnel to which he is referring on the east London line recently and saw the work that is going on. It is forging ahead, as indeed are the links to, and the Jubilee line extension through, his constituency. He has pleaded for those over the years. Is it not time that he said thank you and stopped whingeing?

Mr. Dykes: Is not the Minister right in saying that, instead of being criticised and knocked all the time, London Underground management should be strongly praised for their remarkable performance in providing the world's biggest underground network, despite the pressure on finances? Is my hon. Friend aware that the Jubilee line, which goes to my constituency, will have a service every two minutes once the modernisation and the link to docklands are achieved? Is not the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) right to say, however, that ownership is secondary to adequate investment?

Mr. Bowis: Ownership and investment may go hand in hand. My hon. Friend is right: enormous achievements are in progress for London Underground through investment. The biggest investment is the £2 billion-worth for the Jubilee line, which includes partnership with the private sector—it is the biggest construction project in Europe. He is also right to draw attention to other work, such as the Central line modernisation and the refurbishment of trains; more than half of London's rolling stock is being refurbished and, as we know, the Northern line is not only getting new trains but its structures are being refurbished. A tremendous amount is going on and it is down to the partnership that we have successfully introduced. We are now looking ahead to find out how we can extend that in the future.

School Transport

6. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many children travelled to school by means other than private car in (a) 1979 and (b) 1995. [13350]

Mr. Bowis: It is estimated that, on average, about 5.7 million children aged five to 15 travelled to school by means other than private car during the period 1993 to 1995. Figures are not available for 1979.

Mrs. Golding: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is he aware that Staffordshire county council is being asked to pay an exorbitant 85 per cent. increase on the contract price for the school bus service for the coming year? Bus prices were supposed to fall following deregulation, so will he investigate why that price is rising and whether cartels are being formed by bus companies? We do not want even more children to go to school by car.

Mr. Bowis: I certainly cannot comment on a particular contract between a local authority and a bus operator. The great advantage of privatisation and deregulation is that there is a greater choice, and if the authority is not satisfied with one company, it can go to another. I hope that the hon. Lady will welcome the measure that I announced this morning: the extension of safety measures for children travelling on minibuses and coaches. From today, seat belts will have to be installed in all such post-1988 vehicles. That is a good step forward on road safety, but we want strongly to encourage children to use public transport and bicycles, and to walk.

Mr. Rathbone: My hon. Friend may be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited my constituency on Friday and saw, in Southover school, the preparation of posters to encourage walking to school. Will he report to the House on the success of that initiative, which encourages what must be the best way for children to get to school, saving fuel and helping the environment?

Mr. Bowis: I am not able to give an update on the Southover experiment, but it is one that I hope will be emulated throughout the country. We want routes to be designated by planning authorities, engineers, local education authorities and schools that make it sensible and safe for children to walk to school. It is no good encouraging them to walk if the routes are not safe. The routes must be signed and well lit, and obstacles and places from which people might jump out need to be removed. I formed, and chair, a walking strategy group that is examining carefully ways to encourage more walking and safe walking; that certainly includes walking to school.

Mr. Dafis: Are not strategies to enable children to go to school by means other than private car encompassed in the provisions of the Road Traffic Reduction Bill? I congratulate the Minister and the Government on allowing the Bill to have a Second Reading, and I anticipate that it will have a fair wind. Would not the best way to ensure that the Bill works be to have targets, including UK-wide targets, for the reduction of road traffic? What are the Government's thoughts on the matter?

Mr. Bowis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his thanks to the Government for encouraging the progress of that

Bill, which had all-party support. The Bill is based on local targets, and that fits neatly with the principles of our transport Green Paper, which encouraged such schemes and gave examples of how they could be run. National targets would be unwise and unworkable, because what is right for a rural area is not necessarily right for a city centre. One has to consider each area according to its needs.

We want to encourage more children to walk or cycle to school, given that of the rush-hour traffic about 17 per cent. nationally, and 25 per cent. in London, is accounted for by mothers taking children on short journeys to school. Already, 74 per cent. of children go to school by means other than private car, and we want to increase that figure still further.

Chiltern Railway

7. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the director of Chiltern Railway to discuss the quality of service provided to passengers. [13351]

Mr. Watts: I would be delighted to meet representatives of Chiltern Railway to congratulate them on consistently beating the exacting punctuality and reliability standards required by their passengers charter. Chiltern's passengers are clearly enjoying the fruits of privatisation.

Mr. Lidington: May I invite my hon. Friend to join me in the near future for a journey on the Chiltern line through my constituency, which would enable him to appreciate at first hand both the success of Chiltern Railway in attracting ever more passengers to use its service and the need to encourage Railtrack to work with the company to provide a dual track on the stretch of line north of Princes Risborough in my constituency, which would both benefit commuters travelling from Buckinghamshire and allow for much faster journeys along the Chiltern line between London and Birmingham?

Mr. Watts: I am happy to accept my hon. Friend's invitation to join him on a journey on the Chiltern line.

On track improvements, I understand that the franchising director is willing to consider the proposition of M40 Trains that the investment costs of doubling the track should be assimilated into track access charges and has invited Chiltern Railway to submit informally a draft business case.

Mr. Chidgey: Is the Minister aware that the managing director of Chiltern Railway has stated that, because he has only a seven-year franchise, it is impossible for him to justify purchasing more than four new 100 mph trains, which means that he cannot provide an hourly service between London and Birmingham? Is it not time that the franchising director recognised the needs of the travelling public and stopped letting franchises so short that proper investment is impossible? For the benefit of us all, will he remind the franchising director that we had thought that the purpose of privatisation was to enable rational investment, not to create more constraints than existed before?

Mr. Watts: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is so ill informed about the process of franchising and the substantial number of rolling stock orders that have been placed, in return not only for 10 or 15-year franchises but for franchises of seven years. Indeed, Chiltern Railway was the first private franchise operator to place an order for new trains. This morning, the franchise for Regional Railways North-East was awarded, with a commitment to replace the class 308 rolling stock that serves the area north-west of Leeds with 16 three-car electric multiple units. I am sure that Madam Speaker will not permit me the time to do so, but I could reel off other examples that prove the hollowness of the hon. Gentleman's case.

Rail Privatisation

9. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the cost of rail privatisation. [13353]

Sir George Young: In the six years since 1990–91, the following costs will have been incurred in restructuring, privatising, franchising and regulating the new railway industry: Department of Transport, £91.7 million; British Rail and Railtrack, £417.2 million; and the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and Office of the Rail Regulator, £121.1 million. Those costs represent some 2 to 3 per cent. of total railway industry turnover over that six-year period. They are far outweighed by the proceeds of more than £5 billion that the Government have received from privatisation.

Mr. Grocott: That is a staggering waste of public money, and an incomplete list. Why did the Secretary of State not include the £450 million of consultancy and other fees involved? Why did he not mention the train leasing companies, valued at £3 billion but sold for £1.8 billion? Cannot the Government understand the anger people feel about the sale of priceless national assets such as the rail network, which was built for the most part with picks and shovels owned by us all? As soon as the Government got their grubby hands on the assets, they were sold off at knockdown prices to the few at the expense of the taxpayer.

Sir George Young: That was the same speech that we heard 10 years ago when the Government privatised British Airways. We heard the same diatribes from Opposition Members at every privatisation. Every privatisation has incurred some up-front costs. We believe that they are justified by the enterprise, investment and improved service for customers. Exactly the same arguments apply to British Rail.

Mr. Robathan: Does my right hon. Friend welcome nostalgia that harks back so lovingly to the days of the British Rail sandwich, the mass closure of stations and lines, the wrong snow and the wrong leaves on the track: the standing national joke that was British Rail, notwithstanding the good work done by many? Will he reassure my constituents that he will travel on Midland Main Line so that he can see the excellent work that has been done and the plans that are in hand to increase the number of trains to allow a half-hourly service from London to Leicester, and appreciate the 4 Sight fare, which is finally encouraging people off the M1 and into the trains?

Sir George Young: People outside will contrast what they have just heard from my hon. Friend with what they heard from the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott). My hon. Friend has rightly pointed out that we are already seeing improvements in punctuality and reliability as a result of franchising. The long-term savings from privatisation will be substantial; after seven years, the subsidy for the 20 franchises that we have let will be less than one third of that required by British Rail in 1995–96. We are, therefore, getting a better deal for passengers, at less cost to the taxpayer.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is not the Secretary of State a little frightened of being struck down for the marvellous interpretations of the figures that he manages to give the House? Is not the reality that under some of the new franchises, the old slam-door stock, which is known to be dangerous, is being brought back into operation, painted a new colour and presented as a new service? Is it not true that taxpayers will be paying more after the end of the right hon. Gentleman's machinations, having lost all the assets, than at any other time? Would not it occasionally become the Conservative Government if they just admitted that, in the most brutal and panicky fashion, they have handed bars of gold to all their colleagues in the City in exchange for a worse and unacceptable standard of transport?

Sir George Young: The party that needs to admit that it got it wrong on privatisation is the Labour party, not the Conservative party. As a result of franchising, we are witnessing a £1 billion investment in new rolling stock. There is no way that that sort of investment could have been achieved had the railways remained in the public sector—not under this Government and not under an alternative Government supported by the hon. Lady. We are driving up investment to a far higher level than would have been sustained had the railways remained in the public sector.

Mr. Garnier: When the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned the slam-door rolling stock that has been painted a new colour, did not my right hon. Friend think of new Labour? Will he ask his Department to cost the amount that the privatised Railtrack and privatised franchise companies will be investing in the railways in the next few years? Were that money to come from central Government funding, how much would that cost the British taxpayer?

Sir George Young: The figure for Railtrack is £8 billion spend over five years and the figure for rolling stock investment, which I have just given to the House, is £1 billion. That investment is not coming out of the public sector, and it no longer has to compete with funds for health, education and law and order. The public sector constraint has disappeared. As with other privatisations, railway investment has been driven up fast after privatisation.

London Underground (Privatisation)

10. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies he has carried out concerning the practicability of privatising London Underground. [13354]

Mr. Bowis: We are examining whether the benefits of privatisation can be extended to London Underground. We shall announce our conclusions once that work has been completed.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that there would be a further disbenefit to London from the further disintegration of public passenger transport? Is he not aware that London Transport, the pride of the world's transport systems, was introduced by Herbert Morrison in a Bill in this place? It was initially passed by a Labour Government and passed again by a Conservative Government in 1933. Would not privatisation be disadvantageous to Londoners because, by order, public property would have to be disposed of at a knock-down price? Londoners would also have to continue to pay taxes to subsidise not just the natural subsidy that must be paid, but the profits of the operator. That might conceivably be disadvantageous to the Conservative party at the election.

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is selective in his use of history. I think that he will recall that much of the London underground started as projects of private railway companies, which put the necessary Bills through the House—as did those responsible for the main line rail services. As I said in my initial answer, we are looking carefully to see whether the benefits of privatisation could sensibly apply. If they did, all the relevant requirements and guarantees—for example, those on fares, the levels of service, travelcards, concessionary fares and so on—would have to be included in a Bill .

If the hon. Gentleman wants to see the advantages of privatisation, he need look no further than the privatised railway companies where the number of complaints has been falling, passenger numbers are going up, and reliability, punctuality and new investment are improving. That is certainly something of which we need to take note.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, if London Transport were to be privatised, a regulator would ensure minimum standards of service, maximum levels for fares and the continuation of the concessionary fares scheme which is so vital to pensioners across London?

Mr. Bowis: Leaving aside the detail of regulators and so on, I can certainly reassure my hon. Friend that we would not proceed with a privatisation proposal that did not ensure exactly the reassurances that he and, I think, the majority of Londoners want. That would be in stark contrast to anything that I have heard so far from the Opposition about their policies, which would give no new investment, no new lines and no new money to London's transport services.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Do the Government intend to make any detailed departmental announcement to the House regarding their impractical and deeply unpopular proposals to privatise London Underground, or will such a statement emanate, as has been reported,

from Conservative central office? If it were the latter, would that not constitute a misuse of civil servants by their drafting party political dogma, demonstrating the Government's gross abuse of dedicated public servants whose duty, first and last, is surely to the British people and not to the chairman of the Conservative party and his propaganda machine?

Mr. Bowis: What a load of nonsense. I yield to nobody in my admiration for the public servants who work for the Government of the day and who work to enable them to propose sensible and workable schemes. The hon. Lady is quick to dismiss a proposal that has not even been announced yet; I suggest that she waits, although I can understand her anxiety for it to be introduced quickly. She now recognises—or, if she does not, at least her hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) now recognises—that privatisation has brought benefits in many parts of the transport system and she wants to see whether we have proposals to enable those benefits to be available to London's underground system.

The hon. Lady is impatient for our policy, which is based on a record of investment unequalled since the war. She should be aware that we, too, are impatient—for more details of her policy because they have trickled out, piece by piece by piece. We have had the triple whammy for Londoners of Labour's London transport policy: first, no more money, secondly, no new lines and now a utilities tax on London's buses.

Rail Privatisation

11. **Sir Alan Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received about the performance of the train operating companies since privatisation. [13355]

Mr. Watts: My Department and the franchising director have received 241 letters about the performance of franchised services since franchised operations started, which for some services is now over a year ago.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Will my hon. Friend contrast the reaction following privatisation with the doom and gloom that we heard before privatisation? Are we not starting to see a steady stream of investment and improvement in the railways? All the services are being maintained at least at the level that existed before privatisation and we have the prospect of improvements in track investment—not only the investment that Railtrack has just announced for the West Anglia line serving my constituency, but investment all around the compass.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend is entirely right and, to put those 241 letters into context, those same franchise services will have carried 510 million passengers over the last year. He is right to draw attention to the substantial improvements in services that are being delivered, such as West Anglia Great Northern, which serves his own constituency, and the commitment to introduce a third Stansted skytrain service per hour when necessary to accommodate rising demand. It is a story of new rolling stock, more services for passengers and services being maintained at least at their level before privatisation—and all at substantially lower cost to the taxpayer. It is a double win for passengers and taxpayers.

Mr. Bradley: How many of the representations that the Minister has received from the public relate to the chaos in customer information? Does he accept the view expressed by the Rail Regulator in his recent report that he expects the new customer information system to

> "Do much better than it is doing today in providing information about railway services"?

Is the Minister satisfied with the fulfilment of obligations imposed on private rail operators to provide passengers with details of the cheapest fares and the most rapid journey times available, including those on fares and times relating to competing companies?

Mr. Watts: The last time I was asked a question regarding complaints about passenger information, the answer was 12 complaints from genuine members of the public. Unlike organisations that make bogus complaints, most passengers wishing, for example, to travel to the west country would not go to King's Cross to obtain information on services. On Tuesday 4 February, the first anniversary of the Great Western franchise, I opened the new telephone inquiry bureau in Cardiff, which has expanded capacity and new high-tech equipment and which is fully equipped to give impartial information—a licence condition for all rail operators.

Road Embankments (Landscaping)

12. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to improve the landscaping of motorway and dual carriageway road embankments. [13356]

Mr. Watts: Existing guidance on the landscape treatment of new schemes is set out in the "Good Roads Guide" and is kept under constant review. New guidance on the landscape management of roadside planting is in preparation. Landscape treatments were addressed recently in the Highways Agency's environmental strategy document, "Living with Roads".

Mr. Banks: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that even more should be done to improve the landscaping of embankments along our motorways and dual carriageways, and that we can learn a great deal from schemes that have been completed in other countries? Specifically, will he ensure that the embankments along the new motorway sections of the A1 are imaginatively landscaped with trees, shrubs and features? Moreover, will he instigate a competition among architects, landscape designers and sculptors to redesign the approach road from Heathrow into the capital city so that we can at least impress our visitors? It would be a stimulus for sculptors to put some of their work on public display.

Mr. Watts: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that tree and shrub planting along the A1(M) Walshford-Dishforth improvement section has started this planting season. The remaining tree and shrub planting will take place as soon as possible following completion of the remaining engineering works. We take special care to choose native species of trees and shrubs to enhance the landscape through which our roads are built.

Regarding the approaches to London, my hon. Friend will have noticed significant work on the A4 corridor between Chiswick and Hammersmith, and I invite him to accompany me or my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London to inspect those works.

Rail Freight (Yorkshire)

13. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage the transportation of freight in Yorkshire by rail rather than road; and if he will make a statement. [13357]

Mr. Watts: The key to the revival of rail freight is privatisation. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may scoff, but it is a fact that the amount of freight carried by rail declined steadily throughout the years of state ownership, but that it has recently started to increase. The new private sector freight companies are attracting new traffic to the railway. Meanwhile, we will continue to make available grants to encourage the shift of freight from road to rail. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The question is about Yorkshire.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Minister aware that the rail freight terminal serving Yorkshire and the northern region is in my constituency? It is a key terminal, linking the Yorkshire region with towns in the European Community. The mode of travel for freight is now such that we can introduce a speedy, efficient, door-to-door container service from Wakefield to towns in Europe.

Is the Minister aware of the differences between the piggyback consortium and Railtrack concerning the rail gauge enhancement and of the difficulties that those differences are causing? What will he do to knock heads together so that we can get that system into operation? If the Euro-terminal in my constituency is to succeed, the service must be operating efficiently. Will he ensure that the enhancement of the rail gauge is not put on the back burner or delayed, creating difficulties in getting the terminal operating from my constituency?

Mr. Watts: I am well aware of that excellent new facility, because I took a close interest in the provision of assistance for it from Government funds.

We have appointed consultants to monitor the work undertaken by Railtrack on the piggyback enhancement proposals so that we shall be ready to make a rapid decision should it apply for a freight facilities grant to contribute towards the enhancement. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that some piggyback services can already start to operate commercially because of the development of the spine wagon, which I launched at Rosyth at the end of last year. He will also have noted that English, Welsh and Scottish railways has been in discussions with Milk Marque about the resumption of milk trains using piggyback wagons to carry the tanker trailers.

London-Tilbury-Southend Line

14. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level of services provided on the LTS line to Southend and Shoeburyness since privatisation. [13358]

Sir George Young: The services provided on the LTS line have improved significantly since the franchise, which is operated by Prism Rail plc, commenced operation on 26 May last year. More trains are being run, and reliability and punctuality have improved.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Secretary of State aware that, under the previous management, the service to Southend, where I live with my family, was so deplorable and appalling that it was widely known as the "misery line"? Is he also aware that the job applications of many people in Southend, some of whom I know, to work in London were refused because those people depended on the LTS line to travel to London? In those circumstances, would he be willing to offer his sincere congratulations to the new management? Will he, in all sincerity, seek an assurance from all the parties in the House that, irrespective of who wins the election, there will be no going back to the bad old days?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend speaks for his constituents when he recognises that, following our introducing the passengers charter in 1992, train service performance is at an all-time high. That is good news for his constituents, and good news for all who use that railway.

Under the franchise, two thirds of the rolling stock must be replaced with new rolling stock, and the other third with more modern rolling stock. A new station is being built at West Ham, and £14 million is being invested in new security arrangements. Interestingly, there has been a 66 per cent. fall in the number of assaults on passengers since the franchise was taken over. I hope that all hon. Members will welcome that improvement.

Traffic (M65-A56)

15. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the amount of traffic that will transfer to the M65–A56 after November 1997 from the M62. [13359]

Mr. Watts: No assessment has been made of the amount of traffic that may transfer to the M65–A56 from the M62 upon completion of the M65 Blackburn southern bypass. However, completion of the M65 will result in a 10 per cent. increase in traffic on the existing M65 immediately east of Blackburn.

Mr. Prentice: Is that not an absolute disgrace? Many motorists will look for an alternative means of getting to the north-east from the M6, and they may use the M65-A56 in my constituency. Does the Minister understand the tremendous concern of people in Colne that thousands of vehicles will be dumped on their doorstep? The Government have done absolutely nothing about trunking the A56, which could offer those people some comfort. When is the Minister likely to undertake a general review of the trunk road network because at the moment the silence is deafening?

Mr. Watts: I am aware of the concerns in Colne to which the hon. Gentleman refers, not least because I had an opportunity to discuss them with local councillors when I visited the constituency at the hon. Gentleman's invitation. I undertook that once the M65 Blackburn

southern bypass was completed, we would monitor traffic flows, and that I would keep an open mind about whether a case could be made by the local highway authority for further trunking of the local road network. It is sensible for us to consider such possibilities in the light of evidence, rather than on the basis of speculation.

Mr. Fabricant: Is it not the case that despite the Government's £6 billion road programme, traffic in the Pendle area will be reduced by the introduction of the west coast main line, which will considerably shorten journey times between the north-west, Birmingham and London? Would not the west coast main line, which will encourage trade in the north-west, be jeopardised by a Labour Government, who have sworn not to see the programme through?

Mr. Watts: I share my hon. Friend's confidence that the substantial improvements to the rail network and rail services will help to provide a solution to the problems of congestion on our road network. My hon. Friend is right to point out the fact that Labour would rather spend taxpayers' money on renationalising Railtrack than on carrying out sensible improvements to the entire transport infrastructure.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Drugs

30. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a further statement on the Government's policy on the misuse of drugs. [13374]

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The Government's policy remains that set out in the White Paper, "Tackling Drugs Together", which was published in May 1995. We are determined to sustain a vigorous approach to law enforcement in reducing the supply of illegal drugs, while taking effective action to reduce the demand for drugs among young people and providing accessible treatment to reduce health risks. That strategy is being actively carried forward at the local level by the 105 drug action teams in England, with parallel arrangements in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Dr. Spink: I thank my right hon. Friend for the action that the Government have taken and, indeed, that he has taken to tackle the evil of drugs in our society. Did he see the programme about the dangers of drugs in south-east Essex and note that drugs destroy the lives of our constituents in Essex? Will he join me in welcoming the Crimestoppers initiative and the say no and phone—SNAP—initiative, which encourages youngsters to turn the tables on the evil people who push drugs by giving information to the police on the 0800 555111 telephone number which they can use confidentially?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks. I did not manage to see the programme, but my office is obtaining a video and I hope to watch it. There is no doubt that the results of the SNAP campaign have been striking. I hope that that effort, continuing as part of the general Crimestoppers campaign, will be pursued. I strongly commend my hon. Friend's support for it in south Essex.

Mr. Rooker: May I take this opportunity to offer the Opposition's congratulations on the work that the Leader of the House has done in chairing the important Cabinet Sub-Committee? From recent meetings that I and some of my colleagues shadowing other Departments have had, we are well aware of the right hon. Gentleman's contribution and non-gimmicky approach. The work is treated very seriously outside the House and will be continued by Labour following the general election.

Mr. Newton: I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks about me, and for the assurance that he gave, although I do not anticipate the eventuality.

Mr. Rathbone: Will my right hon. Friend pay particular attention to activities to discourage people in the music industry from making statements and acting in a way that encourages the consumption of drugs among young people, and continue the Government's support for the Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill, which is going through the other place and which we hope will soon become law?

Mr. Newton: I can assure my hon. Friend of the Government's continued support for the Public Entertainments Licences (Drug Misuse) Bill, sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South–West (Mr. Legg). I note also the earlier comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone), with which I have a great deal of sympathy and on which he has recently received a letter from my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Non-Sitting Fridays

31. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the operation of non-sitting Fridays. [13375]

Mr. Newton: Under Standing Order No. 11A, there are 10 constituency Fridays, on which the House does not sit, in each Session. Those Fridays are treated as sitting days for the purpose of calculating periods of notice, and on them hon. Members may give notice of questions and of amendments to Bills between 11 am and 3 pm. The Government have undertaken to use their best endeavours to avoid taking highly contentious business on Thursdays, especially those that fall before constituency Fridays.

Mr. Barnes: Has the Lord President of the Council noticed the impact that non-sitting Fridays and the business generally dealt with on Fridays has had on Thursdays? The right hon. Gentleman has already mentioned the subject. If he compares Prime Minister's Question Time on a Tuesday with that on a Thursday, he will notice that the Chamber is only half full on a Thursday. There is no difference between a Tuesday and a Thursday—the Prime Minister is equally boring on both occasions, so that cannot be the reason. The difference

must involve non-sitting Fridays and their impact on Thursday's business. The House now works virtually a three-day week.

Mr. Newton: Leaving aside the characteristically tendentious second half of the hon. Gentleman's question, I can tell him that the basis on which the Jopling proposals were put to the House was that if constituency Fridays were to be sufficiently beneficial to those who sought them, business on Thursdays would have to be kept light. The non-sitting Fridays have been disproportionately beneficial to the Opposition owing to the greater geographical distance from the House of many Opposition Members' constituencies.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. There will be no points of order until after the statement. The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that we are about to hear an important statement.

Ashworth Hospital

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): With permission, I should like to make a statement about action being taken to address the allegations involving the personality disorder unit at Ashworth hospital in Merseyside. The unit comprises six wards, with 115 patients, within the total population of Ashworth hospital of 473 patients.

Hon. Members will be aware that last Friday I instituted urgent action to address the very serious situation that had been brought to my attention in the preceding few days. In October last year, Stephen Daggett, a patient at Ashworth hospital, made a number of allegations, including the misuse of drugs and alcohol, financial irregularities, the availability of pornographic material, and possible paedophile activity involving a child visitor within the personality disorder unit.

I am advised that the hospital began investigations at that time and that a subsequent ward search on 17 January found a large amount of pornographic material. Despite the availability of this evidence and of Mr. Daggett's allegations, the hospital continued to maintain that press reports of unacceptable and possibly unlawful activity within the personality disorder unit were unfounded.

On 28 January, the Home Office received a letter from the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) enclosing a 60-page dossier setting out the detail of Mr. Daggett's allegations. The dossier was passed by the Home Office to my Department.

On 31 January, police visited the home of a former Ashworth patient who had continued to be a frequent visitor to the hospital. Following that action, a child has been taken into the care of the local authority under an emergency protection order.

In light of the allegations made by Mr. Daggett and of other evidence that has recently become available, I made three announcements on Friday of last week. First, the hospital has suspended three members of staff, including the chief executive. An acting chief executive was appointed with immediate effect. He is Mr. Erville Millar, chief executive of Lambeth Health Care NHS trust, who has a strong background in mental health services. I can further inform the House this afternoon that the hospital has today suspended a member of its medical staff.

Secondly, I established on Friday a statutory inquiry under section 84 of the National Health Service Act 1977 to review the clinical policies and the management of the personality disorder unit at Ashworth hospital. The inquiry will be led by His Honour Judge Peter Fallon QC, a recently retired senior circuit judge. A section 84 inquiry has the power to summon witnesses and to take evidence on oath. The inquiry will determine how and on what terms it takes evidence. It will also be for the inquiry to ensure that its work does not compromise continuing police investigations or possible criminal proceedings, but I would expect it to report within a year. That report will be published.

The terms of reference for the inquiry will be published as soon as possible. They will make it clear that, as it is activities within the hospital's personality disorder unit that have caused recent concern, the inquiry should focus on the policies, management and clinical care provided by that unit. The inquiry will, however, also wish to follow up any wider questions that are necessary to the proper consideration of the issues.

The third announcement I made on Friday was on the alleged involvement of a child. The chief inspector of social services, Sir Herbert Laming, has asked the local authority concerned for a full report on the handling of the case by its social services department. I will decide, in the light of that report, whether further action needs to be taken.

The allegations that have been made about Ashworth hospital are extremely serious, and the public are entitled to reassurance on two counts. First, Ashworth hospital must be properly managed and must provide a high level of security for the benefit both of patients and of the public at large. Secondly, the hospital must also ensure that its patients receive a high standard of clinical care. The action that I announced on Friday is directed at the achievement of both those objectives.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement, and his action in setting up the inquiry under Mr. Fallon. I should also like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) for her action, on behalf of her constituents, in ensuring that the terrible allegations were brought to light and investigated.

The revelations are shocking. Equally disturbing, however, is the fact that the alleged pornography trade and paedophile activity could have gone on undiscovered in a hospital that has recently already been subject to a fundamental and far-reaching inquiry, under the chairmanship of Sir Louis Blom-Cooper. That inquiry was to have led to the introduction of a new complaints procedure, 24-hour nursing across the hospital, and an independent patients' advocacy service. I understand that Ministers were also to monitor the hospital's performance in acting on the inquiry's recommendations, through the so-called "accountability review process". The new allegations illuminate the failure of any effective accountability in the hospital.

Will the Secretary of State tell the House when allegations related to this inquiry were first made to any party? Were the allegations—or allegations on related matters to do with Ashworth hospital—reported at any earlier time, before 28 January, to the Secretary of State, to his predecessor or to any Minister; or to the High Security Psychiatric Services Commissioning Board, to the Ashworth hospital board or to the Mental Health Act Commission? If so, what action was taken in each case?

What visits were paid to the hospital by Ministers or by any of the bodies I have mentioned between October, when the allegations were first made by Mr. Daggett, and receipt of the dossier submitted by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax to the Secretary of State? What conclusions, if any, were drawn from those earlier visits? Were unannounced visits made to the hospital by the commissioning board in the second half of last year? If not, why not, given Ashworth's history? Does the right hon. Gentleman not accept that the allegations expose the dreadful inadequacy of the monitoring systems which are supposed to ensure safety at high-security hospitals?

As for the future, we welcome the inquiry, but we hope that it will be held in public. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that the inquiry will deal with the

[Ms Tessa Jowell]

hospital's chronic staff shortage—which has come to light only because of the dreadful allegations? Does he accept that the gagging of staff, which was introduced by the Government, has made it more difficult for such allegations to come to light? Will he now join Labour in a commitment to end the gagging of staff in the national health service?

After yet more allegations about abuse and depravity in a special hospital, will the Secretary of State also establish an additional and separate inquiry to examine the appropriate treatment and custodial arrangements for people suffering from personality disorder, as part of the wider review called for by Sir Louis Blom-Cooper and Dr. John Reed into the future of the three large special hospitals as appropriate institutions for the care of dangerously mentally ill people?

We do not doubt the seriousness with which the Secretary of State has taken these allegations since they were brought to his attention by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax, but perhaps he needs to be reminded that the people of Britain want a Secretary of State for Health working on health and not devolution, fighting for patients and not the Tory party leadership.

Mr. Dorrell: The Blom-Cooper inquiry made a number of recommendations, all of which except one were implemented. I was on a radio programme with Sir Louis on Saturday morning when he was good enough to acknowledge that, as a consequence of the recommendations that he had made, there had been substantial changes in the regime at Ashworth, changes that he welcomed and which he said reflected the burden of his report.

The only recommendation of the Blom-Cooper report that we did not implement was that we should put an end to the use of seclusion in special hospitals. We stated at the time that we did not intend to accept that recommendation because we felt that it was not possible to run hospitals of that nature while eschewing ever the use of seclusion. Every one of the other recommendations of the Blom-Cooper report was implemented. I shall return to this, because there is an important lesson in the fact that we implemented all but one of Blom-Cooper's recommendations, which we should keep in mind now.

The hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) asked when the allegations were first made. The answer is that they started to circulate in the press in the autumn of last year. It is precisely because the advice and information relating to the allegations and coming to the Department of Health from the hospital now appears to suggest that adequate knowledge was not then being passed on to the Department that we have made the changes that I announced on Friday—the suspension of the manager and the establishment of the inquiry to ascertain exactly what happened, what should be happening and, more important, what should happen in the future.

The hon. Lady also asked whether the inquiry would take place in public. I was careful to say in my statement that that was a matter for the inquiry itself. Therein lies one of the lessons of the Blom-Cooper process. That inquiry was held wholly in public. One of the lessons that we should draw from the Blom-Cooper process is that it did not resolve all the issues for the future of Ashworth. More recent inquiries, especially that surrounding the events of the Beverley Allitt case, suggest that it is easier for independent inquiries of this nature—I stress the words "independent inquiries"—to get to the bottom of what exactly happens in these very difficult cases if at least some of the evidence is taken in private.

That specific provision was included in the announcement that I made on Friday so that Mr. Fallon should have that option open to him if he wishes to take it. It is a matter for him and his inquiry. The inquiry report will of course be published.

I reject what the hon. Lady said about what she calls gagging clauses. The only provision that we have made in contracts for staff of the health service is that, where there is a disagreement between members of staff and their employing authority, the staff should first take their disagreements to the authority. We have never sought to prevent members of staff taking their disagreements outside the authority if they fail to get satisfaction. With respect, it is not members of staff who have been the key to the changes that I announced on Friday.

The hon. Lady is right about the treatment of personality disorders. One of the difficulties surrounding the treatment of mentally ill and disturbed patients is knowing how to deal with those suffering from long-term personality disorders. That question is currently the subject of discussion with the psychiatric profession and is, I suggest, best dealt with in that context, as it is the clinicians who ultimately have to make the decisions about the treatment of individuals.

The commissioning board is part of the Department of Health. It is conducting a review of the future of special hospital provision and high-security psychiatric care. That is one of the issues that Sir Louis Blom-Cooper feels that we should consider in the light of the history of the special hospitals. That is why the commissioning board is reviewing it.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs. Mahon: I welcome the Secretary of State's decision to set up the inquiry. Will it investigate the treatment meted out to Stephen Daggett, who went to extraordinary lengths to get the inquiry under way, including absconding and, when he was moved to Rampton against his will, going on hunger strike? Can I have an assurance that his case will be looked into? Will the Secretary of State also give other whistleblowers, such as staff who might want to speak out, some protection? I share the anxiety about gagging clauses expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell).

Is the Secretary of State aware that the chief executive of Rampton had Stephen Daggett's report on 25 November? Did she call the police, inform the Department of Health or the Home Office, or—as I am led to believe—simply photocopy it and send it back to Ashworth, saying to Mr. Daggett, "This is an Ashworth question, not ours"? If she did, will her behaviour be included in the investigation?

When did the visits to Lawrence ward by the little girl mentioned in the report stop? Does the Secretary of State agree that, if they were allowed to continue after early October, many people who should have known better left her unnecessarily exposed to danger?

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the way in which she has responded to the announcements that I made on Friday. I should also have said that I am grateful to the hon. Member for Dulwich for the way in which she and her hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Health have responded. To the extent that examining the background to Mr. Daggett's care is relevant to the wider inquiry on the way in which Lawrence ward has been run—it is clearly one of the central issues—of course the inquiry will look into the nature of the care that he received and where it went wrong.

It is perfectly true that the dossier that Mr. Daggett provided to the manager of Rampton was sent, on my understanding, on the Monday following its receipt to the manager of Ashworth, but, as I said in my original statement and repeated this afternoon, that dossier was not made available to officials or Ministers in my Department until the hon. Member for Halifax sent it to me.

I do not seek to give an authoritative answer to the hon. Lady's question about the last day on which the girl who is now in care visited the ward, because it is one of the issues that the inquiry will consider in great detail. It will look into whether such visits took place, on what terms and how often, and when they came to an end. Those alleged visits are at the centre of the concerns that have been expressed about the case.

Sir Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and for the prompt action that he took as soon as he was alerted to the situation. The apparent lack of supervision at Ashworth is worrying. The suggestion of paedophilia and child abuse is horrifying and appalling.

My right hon. Friend referred to wider issues. Do those include the way in which such institutions are run? Anyone who needs medical treatment should surely receive it, but the people in Ashworth are there, first, because they have committed serious offences, and, secondly, because they need medical treatment. Should not security and supervision in such institutions be just as rigorous as in conventional prisons? Is it not self-evident that that was not the case at Ashworth?

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome for the prompt action that was taken. I entirely agree with him about the pre-eminent need for security in hospitals of this nature, although he is not entirely right in saying that every patient in a special hospital is an offender. People can be sent to such hospitals if they suffer from dangerous disorders, without having committed an offence. They are there because both they and the rest of society need the protection that a highly secure environment can provide. Hospitals are failing if they do not provide that security: they are failing their patients, and the wider public. My hon. Friend is right to emphasise that that is one of the prime responsibilities of such institutions.

As for the broader question of the long-term future of high-security psychiatric care, that—as I said in answer to an earlier question—is one of the issues that the commissioning board is now actively reviewing.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and for the prompt action that has been taken. Like him, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahan).

May I put it to the right hon. Gentleman, however, that the answers that he has given today have not dealt with one issue? I refer to the fear that quasi-independent national health service trusts, and the management of the three special hospitals—Ashworth, Broadmoor and Rampton—are able to be semi-autonomous, and that no one checks that they carry out their activities in the interests of patients and the wider public, rather than in their own interests and with a view to their own managerial self-preservation.

May I suggest that the way forward—I should be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman would give it serious consideration—is the establishment of a standing inspectorate of health and social care that can inspect any trust, hospital or other health service facility at any time, at the instigation of patient, member of staff or friend or relative? We need to ensure that there is someone outside the premises who can check on what is going on. In this instance, the concern is that, although the allegations were made, for internal reasons people decided not to take them seriously or to do anything. That is a very worrying state of affairs.

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's diagnosis. The problem is that such institutions are too tightly held, and that information that should properly be available to the accountability chain—including, ultimately, me as Secretary of State—apparently was not available. I have set up the inquiry to establish why it was not.

The hon. Gentleman asked for a separate agency or inspectorate to examine such issues. With all respect, that is not the solution that immediately suggests itself to me, given that we already have two agencies dealing specifically with mental health. The Health Advisory Service actually went to Ashworth in 1995, and delivered a report that suggested that the situation there was improving. That agency—an agency of the precise kind that the hon. Gentleman suggests—delivered a report which, although not devoid of criticism, was generally encouraging following that visit, which was not very long ago. Detained, restricted and sectioned patients also already have the protection of the Mental Health Act Commission. So, in the specific field of high-security psychiatric services, we already have two bodies of the kind that the hon. Gentleman is considering.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): They are not very effective.

Mr. Dorrell: Indeed. That is why I do not think that we should leap to the conclusion that another of those agencies is the answer. We should be considering why information did not flow, at the time when it should have, to the people who were accountable for what went on in the hospital.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): The Secretary of State suggests that the information was in the

[Mrs. Jane Kennedy]

public domain because it was being discussed in the media—in the press. Is it not a shocking indictment of the commissioning boards that no one appears to have made an unannounced visit to Ashworth, given the history of that unit? Will the Secretary of State accept ministerial responsibility for the commissioning boards—and for the failure of those boards—if it is shown that they are failing us to such an extent, given that they were set up such a short time ago by his Government?

Mr. Dorrell: I have never sought to avoid ministerial responsibility for what goes on in any part of the health service, including special hospitals. That is why I took the action I did on Friday, when it was clear to me that questions had been asked, and that charges and allegations—serious allegations—had been made and had not been adequately examined by those in the front line. The question whether unannounced visits should take place is no doubt one of the questions that Mr. Fallon will examine.

However, with respect, I do not think that that can be the whole answer. I do think that there needs to be in place a management structure that observes the protocol between the Department of Health and individual special hospitals. That protocol makes it crystal clear that, where such allegations are made about treatment in the hospital, they should be reported. The advice available to me at present suggests that they were not.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the Secretary of State accept that, over a long period, there has been succession of inquiries, including by journalists—particularly the local newspaper editor, for instance, who suffered as a result of gagging restraints being placed on him because of speaking out about what was happening at Ashworth? That has all militated against bringing out into the open what takes place in the hospital.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the greatest public concern at present involves the presence of a child on those premises? Will he now tell the House which local authority that child is in the care of, and undertake that nothing will be done to impede the flow of any information that may come out of the inquiry to the Merseyside police, particularly in connection with their inquiry, which is already under way, into paedophile and child abuse activities in the region?

Mr. Dorrell: I can give the absolute assurance that nothing will be done to impede the flow of information. I do not propose to reveal which local authority is responsible for the social services department, for the fairly obvious reason that it would be quite hard to preserve confidentiality in relation to the child if we narrowed it down to one local authority and an ex-Ashworth patient with a young child. That would severely jeopardise the ability to maintain that confidentiality.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that there is evidence that, some time ago, trade unionists who worked at the hospital received representations about the allegations, and that, in some cases, they were warned that, if they opened their mouths too wide, the union would be de-recognised? Is he aware that one of the features of this Government is that, more and more, trade union free collective bargaining is prevented in these institutions, including in nursing homes? His Government encourage such activity.

The Secretary of State and the Government should be aware of the fact that trade unions are not just about wages; they are about conditions, and they act as watchdogs to alert the management to practices. It is high time that more attention was paid to such people, who have to work for a living, so that they can alert the authorities to some of the abuses that have taken place at Ashworth and elsewhere.

Mr. Dorrell: The suggestion that any part of the health service has threatened to remove recognition from a trade union that has raised such a concern is, frankly, ridiculous. One of the features of the hon. Gentleman's contributions to the House's debates is that they get further and further removed from anything that resembles the sort of world in which the rest of the House lives.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), who carried out her parliamentary duties in the most conscientious way. A tribute should certainly be paid to her for so doing.

Is the Secretary of State aware that the large majority of people believe that he should have enough on his plate as Secretary of State for Health without delving into Scottish nationalism, devolution or developments in the European Union? Is it not unfortunate that he finds plenty of opportunities for such headline work, trying to promote himself in the Tory party, and not doing the job for which he was appointed in the first place?

Mr. Dorrell: I notice that, when the opportunity arises to make a contribution to one of the most difficult aspects of the health service, all the hon. Gentleman can think of is an opportunity to make silly party political points. I think that the House and the country will draw their own conclusions from his action.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): If it is true that some information about these matters, in particular Mr. Daggett's comments, was being reported in the press in late autumn, is it not fair to say that the Minister's private office would have been aware of that? If it was aware of it, why did it not carry out inquiries as early as that, instead of the inquiry being set up today?

Mr. Dorrell: The answer is that questions were asked on behalf of Ministers, and answers were given that suggested that there was not a problem. It is precisely that failure to pass on the information central to proper accountability that is the focus of the inquiry that I have set up.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Should not the whole question of the grouping together of so many people with the medical condition that leads to this sort of perverse conduct be re-examined? Is it really advisable that so many people should be congregated together who are only too likely to indulge themselves in this sort of improper performance and conduct? Should this not be a matter that is looked at in this investigation?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Incidentally, it would be wrong to imagine that every

patient in the personality disorder unit is there because of sexual offences, as that is not the case. Personality disorder has a wider meaning than that.

However, there is a serious question about the proper provision for people with severe personality disorders. I suggest that lay Members of this House should approach this question by taking the advice of trained psychiatrists, who have a proper understanding of what is and is not possible with modern psychiatric science. Having said that, I believe that the hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that there are important questions about clinical judgment concerning the treatment of such patients, and that is exactly what the commissioning board is examining.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Why is it that everything that goes right in government is the result of the work of Ministers, and everything that goes wrong is the fault of civil servants?

Mr. Dorrell: Whenever I speak about the work of the NHS, I am careful to say that its successes are the result not of political insight but of the dedication and professionalism of the professional staff who work in the health service day after day. I find it rather difficult to stomach the slighting of their work that sometimes comes from Opposition Members.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Blom-Cooper report—all but one of whose recommendations have been followed—recommended that there should be an internal inquiry into the dissemination of what it described as "unacceptable literature". It is clear from what the Secretary of State has said that that inquiry has been held. What recommendations were made as a result of that inquiry? From what he has said and what has been reported today, it seems that the recommendations were not effective. When was the inquiry held? What system of accountability currently exists? At what point do he and his office become aware that the system is breaking down?

Mr. Dorrell: I inherited the regime that was introduced following the report. The hon. Gentleman asked how I deal with the implementation of recommendations. The answer is that I make individuals responsible for them, and I set time scales for reports on the implementation of the proposals. I am advised, and am satisfied, that all the recommendations in the Blom-Cooper report, with the exception of the one concerning seclusion, were implemented. I do not know precisely what regime was set up to enforce accountability for the implementation.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Pursuant to the Secretary of State's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), what questions were asked, and what answers to those questions suggested that there was not a problem? It seems as if the Department's officials were deceived by the answers. Is that the case, or were the wrong questions asked?

Did any Minister or official go to or contact this hospital between September and January? As a former parliamentary private secretary to one of the Secretary of State's predecessors who had to deal with Ely, Farley and South Ockenden, I know how difficult questions relating to psychiatric hospitals are. However, I repeat: what questions were asked, and what answers led to the suggestion that there was no problem?

Mr. Dorrell: The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), visited the hospital last autumn. He discussed the issues with the hospital management when he was there. I refer the hon. Gentleman and the House to the paragraph in my statement in which I said:

"Despite the availability of this evidence and of Mr. Daggett's allegations, the hospital continued to maintain that press reports of unacceptable and possibly unlawful activity within the . . . unit were unfounded."

The hon. Gentleman asked what questions were asked. The questions asked were the obvious ones, given the nature of the reports that were circulating: we asked, "May we please have advice about the nature of the allegations and what is being done to follow them up?" I do not propose to be drawn further on the advice that was given, beyond saying that the advice received by Ministers and officials in the Department of Health from the hospital made it clear that the hospital did not believe that there was a problem. That is one of the issues that will be at the centre of the inquiry that Mr. Fallon will lead.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Further to the previous question, how often do Ministers visit such hospitals? Should not those hospitals be inspected regularly by official bodies, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) suggested, and by Ministers, in order to build a culture that encourages visits rather than a culture of neglect?

Mr. Dorrell: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is illustrated by the fact that my hon. Friend with direct responsibility for the special hospitals has visited all three in the four months that he has been responsible for them. In the period that I carried that responsibility, I visited two of the three. Those hospitals are regularly visited by Ministers, but anybody who believes that a ministerial visit is the means of discovering whether serious abuse is taking place on an individual ward has not carried out any ministerial visits.

Questions to Ministers

4.6 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last week, I read in the press that the Prime Minister had given the Secretary of State for Health some constitutional responsibilities, so I attempted to table a question at the Table Office. My question was refused. If the Secretary of State has those additional responsibilities, should not hon. Members be able to ask him questions? Should he not be accountable to the House? In the light of the statement we have just heard about the Ashworth scandal, would it not be better for him to stick to the Department of Health?

Madam Speaker: I always enjoy the hon. Gentleman's points of order and the way that he is able to keep his face straight when he is making the most facetious comments.

BIRDS (REGISTRATION CHARGES) BILL

Ordered,

That the Birds (Registration Charges) Bill be referred to a Second Reading Committee.—[*Mrs. Lait.*]

Orders of the Day

Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

4.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Sir George Young): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill will make a major new contribution to the Government's highest priorities for shipping policy—improving safety and minimising pollution at sea.

There has been widespread consultation on the measures in the Bill in all quarters. In line with the Government's policy, the Bill itself was published in draft before its introduction. The consultation revealed a high degree of support as well as some useful suggestions for improvement. The Bill has benefited from extensive consideration in another place, where it received all-party support.

The Bill adds new measures to the existing framework of policies and is wholly consistent with the Government's fourfold approach to safety and pollution policy—first, seeking to prevent incidents from happening in the first place; secondly, mitigating the consequences once an incident has occurred; thirdly, ensuring that timely and appropriate compensation is paid following an incident; and finally, ensuring that the lessons will be learnt to help prevent future occurrences.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the second issue, does the Secretary of State intend to introduce mandatory provision for port waste reception facilities, with mandatory port waste management plans?

Sir George Young: I shall reach that section of my speech in a moment. The answer is yes—we are planning to impose an obligation to have waste management plans on the port authorities. We propose to proceed by voluntary methods if we can, and when I reach the relevant section, I hope to say something further on that.

After the loss of the Braer tanker in 1993, the Government decided that the time was right to commission a wide-ranging investigation into the prevention of pollution at sea. Lord Donaldson was appointed to head an inquiry whose remit was

"to advise on whether any further measures are appropriate and feasible to protect the United Kingdom coastline from pollution from merchant shipping. Due consideration should be given to the international and economic implications of new measures".

The report of Lord Donaldson's team, "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas", was welcomed by Government and has since also been recognised internationally as an outstanding contribution to maritime policy on safety and pollution.

The Government have accepted 91 of the 103 recommendations in the report. More than half of them have already been implemented. In some cases, the Government were able to act without new legislation or international agreement. For example, the United Kingdom continues to exercise a rigorous port state control regime and has taken the world lead in publishing lists of detained ships. It has become increasingly successful in detecting substandard ships. Flags with poor safety records, as well as certain types of ships—including oil tankers—are targeted for inspection. Expanded inspections on certain types of ship such as passenger ships, bulk carriers and tankers, began from the start of last year. We have also announced our intention to publish a list of ships found polluting in UK waters or committing offences likely to lead to pollution.

My Department is continuing to press hard for early implementation of those of Lord Donaldson's recommendations for which international agreement is needed, through the International Maritime Organisation and other international forums. The Bill will enable us to implement the recommendations that we have accepted, which require primary legislation.

The Bill contains a number of measures that will contribute to our primary objective of incident prevention. Standards are a key weapon of safety policy and a wide range of standards, covering the design, construction, maintenance and operation of ships, are already in place.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The reality, however, is that another incident has been reported today, with yet more sea birds dying of pollution. Is the Secretary of State satisfied that the House will have sufficient time to examine this most complex and technical legislation, by jamming it between a statement lasting until 4 o'clock and a decision at 7 o'clock? Is that an adequate and sensible way of considering legislation?

Sir George Young: As I said, the Bill was published in draft, there was extensive consultation and many helpful comments were made. It was also debated at length in another place. Of course, there will be a Committee stage and the Committee will have an opportunity of going through the Bill clause by clause. I know that the House will want to give the Bill the serious attention that it deserves.

Flags with poor safety records, as well as certain types of ships, including oil tankers, are targeted for inspection. Expanded inspections on certain types of ship, such as passenger ships, bulk carriers and tankers, began from the start of last year. We have announced our intention to publish a list of ships found polluting in UK waters.

The Bill contains a number of measures that will contribute to our primary objective of incident prevention.

Mr. Dalyell: My constituency on the Forth is deeply affected—our beaches are filthy because of dumping. Is the lack of prosecutions for the illegal disposal of plastics at sea primarily because the Marine Safety Agency has insufficient evidence to take legal action? Could that matter be dealt with at some point during the Secretary of State's speech or during the debate?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will deal with that when he replies or in Committee. One of the clauses clarifies the powers for dealing with pollution other than by oil. Perhaps action is not taken simply because there is not enough evidence to secure a conviction.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) referred to the incident this morning. The marine pollution control unit has arranged for

samples of oil from the birds to be sent for analysis, to find out more details. If it can be shown that the oil came from an oil tanker, as it is attributable to the slick, it should be possible to make a claim through the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund.

Standards are constantly kept under review and updated by the Marine Safety Agency, often in the context of international agreements. For the majority of vessels in UK waters, the legal powers to update those standards are already in place.

In his report, Lord Donaldson identified fish factory ships, also known as klondykers, as a particular problem. Some klondykers fall through a loophole and are not at present covered by national or international standards. Clause 11 would allow requirements relating to safety to be prescribed for such ships. To ensure that those standards can be enforced, the clause provides for a notice to be served prohibiting the ships from carrying on with fish processing if the requirements are not met.

With marine pollution, public attention and headlines often focus on the high-profile single incidents, such as large spills from oil tankers. The Government are no less committed to doing all that is reasonably possible to prevent the equally important problem of illegal discharges of ships' wastes. To that end, my Department announced in January last year a package of 18 measures to combat illegal discharges.

The measures make use of the carrot-and-stick approach. Clause 5 is the carrot. It increases the incentives to ship operators to make proper use of port waste reception facilities. The stick is more effective enforcement measures and the threat of tougher penalties, strengthened by the higher maximum fines in clause 7.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Why is the maximum fine increased to £250,000 for oil tankers, but to only £25,000 for chemical carriers? The Secretary of State will be aware that there have been several illegal discharges of chemicals that have caused as much damage as an oil discharge to the marine environment. What is the reason for the glaring discrepancy between oil and chemical tankers?

Sir George Young: When he winds up the debate, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will deal with that specific point on clause 7, which, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, increases the penalty for causing pollution to £250,000—if it is indeed the case that the higher fine applies only to oil.

I said that the measures took the carrot-and-stick approach, and I touched on the stick, which is the threat of tougher penalties, strengthened by the higher maximum fines in clause 7.

Mr. Dalyell: Before we leave the subject of the stick, there is the crucial question of evidence, which has to be obtained to bring a case to court. There has to be proof that a vessel does not have the appropriate amount of waste on board for its size and the length of time that it has spent at sea, but in the North sea, it is extremely difficult to identify the culprits. Often, incidentally, we suspect that they are not tankers but other ships discharging waste. Is there any way in which an assessment can be made of how much garbage should be on board for the length of time that has been spent at sea?

Sir George Young: Again, I hope that we shall be able to say something helpful to the hon. Gentleman later. It is certainly the case that the marine pollution control unit is doing more work to identify more accurately which waste is dumped by which ship. The question of evidence is crucial. As I said a moment ago, when it can be proved that the oil has come from an oil tanker, there is the prospect of compensation. We are doing more work to identify those who are polluting our seas.

Lord Donaldson's inquiry recognised the importance of port waste reception facilities to the fight against pollution. In order to improve their provision and use, the inquiry recommended dialogue between the ports and the shipping and waste industries. We consulted those industries and other interested parties and they agreed that the best way of guaranteeing an effective dialogue was through the development of port waste management plans. Such plans should ensure that port waste reception facilities are adequate for the types and amounts of wastes generated; easy to use; easy to find; and not disproportionately expensive.

We are very encouraged by the fact that many ports have already begun the planning process on a voluntary basis. However, if necessary, clause 5 would enable us to make plans mandatory for all ports, from the largest commercial port to small fishing or yachting harbours.

Clause 5 would allow us to alter charging practices if they were acting as a disincentive to the use of reception facilities. It would also allow us to make the discharge of wastes mandatory, for specific types of waste or ships if, in spite of adequate and fairly priced provision, the facilities at ports were not being used.

Clause 10 allows us to reduce the risk of incidents at sea by preventing dangerous situations from arising.

Mr. Dalyell: I am sorry to interrupt again, but it would be helpful if the Secretary of State said something about his attitude to the inclusive fee arrangements.

Sir George Young: In some ports, there is no charge for using the waste facilities—it is included in the overall port fee. In others, there is a separate charge at the point of use. The Government's view is that when an arrangement works adequately, there is no point in our intervening, but there are reserve powers to make the discharge of wastes mandatory for specific sorts of waste or ships if, in spite of adequate and fairly priced provision, the facilities at ports are not being used. Clause 5 contains powers to alter charging practices if they act as a disincentive to the use of reception facilities. In other words, if the reception facilities are so expensive that no one uses them, we have powers to alter the way in which they are charged for. I hope that the Bill contains powers to deal with the hon. Gentleman's important point.

Clause 10 gives the Government the power to require ships to move on, provided that they are not on legitimate business or exercising a right of innocent passage. For example, the power could be used on a ship anchored in the middle of a busy sea lane or a ship deliberately obstructing others in contravention of the collision regulations.

The Government are committed to ensuring that steps are taken to reduce the scale, and mitigate the impact, of an incident that has already occurred. Clause 2 would widen our powers to intervene in a salvage operation following a pollution incident at sea. The powers exist so

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that action can be taken if, for example, a shipowner is taking insufficient action or a salvage operation is not being conducted in an appropriate manner.

The current test for intervention stipulates that the power to act is exercisable when an accident has occurred to, or in, a ship and oil from the ship will, or may, cause "pollution on a large scale".

Clause 2 changes the wording to "significant" and so ensures that the powers can be used where appropriate, regardless of the size of the incident. It also extends the range of persons to whom directions can be given for the purposes of intervention, by providing that directions can be given to harbour masters, harbour authorities and pilots, in addition to the owner, any person in possession of the ship, the master or the salvor.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): When a pilot is guiding a ship through straits or into a harbour, does he have charge of the ship, or is his role that of an adviser to the captain of the vessel?

Sir George Young: There are some questions that one can answer without hesitation at the Dispatch Box, and others in respect of which one would do well to pause and take professional advice before even thinking about answering. The hon. Gentleman's question falls into the latter category. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has the answer when he winds up.

The geographical limit of the powers has been extended to include UK-controlled waters up to the 200 nautical mile limit. Clause 1 introduces powers for the establishment of temporary exclusion zones at sea. Such zones would be set up for life saving, prevention of pollution and prevention of damage in UK waters, or part of the sea that includes designated areas lying within the 200 nautical mile limit. Details of the size and position of the zones would be regularly broadcast by Her Majesty's Coastguard and notified by the International Maritime Organisation. The innovation is similar to air exclusion zones, which can already be defined, and was among Lord Donaldson's recommendations.

A swift response and co-operation among several parties are vital during emergency counter-pollution operations. Clause 6 simplifies the procedures for the Government to grant indemnities to those who assist with counter-pollution operations at our request. It is important to ensure that mechanisms are in place to provide adequate and timely compensation to those who have suffered loss following a pollution incident at sea. The UK has played an active part in negotiations to secure agreement where international co-operation is necessary. In the past, that led to the setting up of an international fund for compensation for damage arising from oil pollution.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the Secretary of State think that what he is doing in relation to compensation will prevent people who have to make quick decisions from having compensation at the forefront of their minds, to the possible detriment of the speed at which the decision is made?

Sir George Young: One of the objects of the Bill is for the Government to give indemnities, to prevent those who have to respond at the Government's request from hesitating to do so because of fears of litigation. I hope that that deals with the hon. Gentleman's point.

The Bill contains provision in clause 15 for the United Kingdom to implement and ratify a protocol to amend the 1976 convention on limitation of liability for maritime claims. The protocol would increase the amount of compensation available to meet maritime claims other than for oil pollution. More important, the protocol would increase the amount of compensation available to passengers and their dependants.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Eligibility for compensation certainly remains a sore point and a live issue in Pembrokeshire at the moment. At the beginning of his speech, the Secretary of State gave an undertaking that full compensation would be paid to people affected, but some people who can clearly show that they were affected find that they are not eligible on the ground that they were affected once or twice removed from the original incident.

The right hon. Gentleman may recall the case of one of my constituents, Mr. Barrie Foster, who is an adviser and consultant on tourism activities. He found that courses that he had prepared for commercial purposes had to be cancelled because the market had gone. Mr. Foster has been told, however, that he cannot be compensated because the link between the Sea Empress disaster and his work is some distance removed. Will the Bill address that issue?

Sir George Young: I am not sure that it will. As with every insurance claim, one has to establish that one has suffered a financial loss. That is true as a result of the Sea Empress, as with any other accident. I understand that compensation is paid for financial hardship when people find themselves in real difficulty. At the moment, there is a 75 per cent. cap on the claims that are being paid, but there will be an opportunity to review that in the next few days, when the relevant committee meets.

The IMO is considering the development of an international regime, to require all ships to carry documentary evidence of the owner's ability to meet third party liabilities. No such requirement currently exists, except for oil tankers. An irresponsible minority of shipowners operate without insurance. We believe that it is unacceptable for them to gain a commercial advantage over responsible shipowners. Clause 16 contains an enabling power for the UK to introduce a requirement for shipowners to have insurance, or another form of financial security, to cover their liabilities. Failure to comply with those requirements could result in tough penalties, including detention and fines of up to £50,000 in the magistrates courts. Our preference would be to exercise those powers in the context of international agreement.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): The Braer disaster was caused by a ship in transit from Norway to Canada. Does the Secretary of State intend to re-route ships to keep them out of territorial waters, because how can he justify boarding a ship to find out whether it is covered for insurance, when it is sailing through the Minch and the Moray firth? How would we achieve that? Would we use

gunboats and insist on boarding such vessels? Or would we ban all those coffin ships from our waters, as the United States has done?

Sir George Young: As I understand the powers, they apply to ships that come to United Kingdom ports, not to ships of passage through international waters. As I have already said, the IMO is considering an international regime, which would cover all ships. It would require all ships to carry documentary evidence of the owner's ability to meet third party liabilities. We are taking powers in the legislation to deal with the United Kingdom, and on an international dimension, we are pursuing powers to deal with ships outside UK waters.

When the Government invited Lord Donaldson to make his report, he was asked to consider the international and economic implications of any new measures. He endorsed the "user pays" and "polluter pays" principles, in accordance with which the shipping sector should bear the costs that it imposes.

Clause 13 contains enabling powers to recover the costs of maritime services. That could include the standing costs of emergency response and emergency towing, the costs of inspection where not already recovered, and the costs of standard setting activity. If necessary under the terms of an international agreement, light dues, which are already charged for, could be included in a wider charging scheme for maritime services.

We recognise that new charges for maritime services could have adverse implications for the competitiveness of UK ports, shipowners based in UK ports and exporters and importers using UK ports. We take those issues very seriously and have therefore stated that the preferred approach would be to implement those provisions in the context of international agreement.

Dr. Godman: On the question of charges, what of charges relating to Coastguard duties? Why are the Secretary of State and his officials so—I nearly said hostile—so reluctant to address the concerns felt by many about vessels steaming through the Minch? In a recent two-month period, 450 ships passed through the Minch, of which 25 per cent. passed through improperly, that is, they failed to report in to the Coastguard. Why do we not have a compulsory Coastguard reporting scheme for the Minch?

Sir George Young: I shall look at the hon. Gentleman's suggestion and see whether we can respond positively to it. We do not propose to include charges for search and rescue under these facilities.

Mr. Eric Clarke: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way—I know that we may be trying his patience, but it is important that we know whether the ocean-going tugs that are stationed at strategic points around the United Kingdom will be covered by the insurance. There has been talk of some of them being withdrawn because no one can subsidise their provision. Will that be covered in the plan?

Sir George Young: The position is that, for the past three winters, there have been emergency tugs stationed by the Government in certain key places—on the Dover straits and up at Stornoway and, recently, one was introduced on the south-west approach. Those are broadly the priorities that Donaldson recommends. When I spoke a moment ago about what the powers might cover, I said that they could include the standing costs of emergency response and emergency towing, so those could, indeed, be included in the charging regime that I have just touched on.

There are some other measures in the Bill. The opportunity is being taken to introduce a number of minor changes to merchant shipping legislation. For example, clause 23 provides for the Government to enter into international agreements concerning the protection of wrecks. Recent years have seen dramatic progress in underwater diving techniques and virtually all wrecks are now accessible to commercial salvors if they believe that there is an opportunity for commercial gain. We believe that we should take a reserve power to enable us to control those activities. We would use the power when necessary, to ensure that proper respect is paid to the final resting place of those who perished on a wreck. That would fill a gap left by the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 and the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Would it not be helpful if, in the miscellaneous areas that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned in respect of amending earlier merchant shipping Acts, there be added the contents of a private Member's Bill that was moved in the 1975 Session, which provided that where a Secretary of State does not order a public inquiry when lives have been lost, those affected can apply to the High Court, to ensure that the Secretary of State calls such an inquiry? Without that power, should such important matters be left only to a single brain?

Sir George Young: I have every sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point, which refers back to the Marchioness tragedy. In that case, there was a marine accident investigation branch inquiry and the jury accepted its findings. Despite the hon. Gentleman's powerful case, I am not persuaded that it would be right to have an additional power for a member of the victim's family to ask for a public inquiry in those cases.

Clause 19 excludes the Royal National Lifeboat Institution from the Coastguard's power to summon vessels to assist other ships that are wrecked, stranded or in distress. That has been done at the RNLI's request, to ensure that it retains control of its vessels at a local level. In addition, RNLI vessels are provided to save lives rather than property, but the existing legislation would allow them to be used for both. The Coastguard does not and would not use those powers in practice and we are happy to rule out the legal possibility. The RNLI and Her Majesty's Coastguard work together closely and the two organisations enjoy excellent relations between officers at all levels. I welcome this opportunity to pay tribute to the invaluable contribution that the RNLI makes to safety at sea.

The Bill contains a package of carefully designed measures, many of which originated from Lord Donaldson's thorough report and which have been the subject of extensive consultation with a wide range of interested parties. I am sure that the House will join me in wishing to see those measures implemented as quickly as possible, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have waited until

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

this juncture to raise it, so that I did not interfere with the flow of the debate, as it does not relate to the Bill before us.

I tabled a parliamentary question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, asking him to supply information in the Library about electoral registration in each constituency, because the new registers come into operation on 16 February. That question was transferred to the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics, and the reply came from the ONS. The reply is that the ONS is preparing a monitor, detailing electors on the 1997 electoral register, by the new parliamentary constituencies. It will be published by early April 1997, and will be placed in the Library on publication date.

It is highly unacceptable that, although we can readily discover the numbers in our own constituency, we must wait until April—possibly after the general election—to see the national pattern, so that we may find out how many people are in each constituency and compare the number of people who may be missing from local electoral registers with the national figures.

I seek your assistance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, regarding ways in which the House may have placed before it essential information that will be in the hands of the Office for National Statistics by 16 February, so that it can be published early—for instance, in duplicated form. Thus we would not have to wait until it was printed in the monitor.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The hon. Gentleman has been in the House for many years. As he points out, the official date is next week. It seems to me that that leaves several days for him to use his considerable ingenuity to ensure that that point, having been raised on the Floor of the House, is dealt with adequately.

4.36 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): This is a vital Bill, and it is no less important for being in many respects uncontentious.

Lives at sea and the security of our marine environment need better protection. I hope that there is general agreement on that. Further to the remark that my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) made about the time available for the debate, perhaps we have the answer in the disgraceful sparsity of Conservative Back Benchers. It is a great pity that more Conservative Members are not taking an interest in the debate.

Labour Members welcome the Bill in principle and in its implementation of many of the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's report. We join the Secretary of State in praising the work of Lord Donaldson and his colleagues. Their report is a work of tremendous authority, which has received international acclaim.

We know that there is no room for complacency on the action needed to improve both the prevention of shipping accidents and pollution and the procedures for tackling them effectively when they occur. But for extraordinary good fortune, the Braer disaster, which gave rise to the Donaldson inquiry, would have been many times worse. This coming Saturday, 15 February, will be the first anniversary of the Sea Empress disaster, in which 72,000 tonnes of crude oil and 360 tonnes of heavy fuel oil were spilt, affecting much marine life, 7,000 birds and miles of the most beautiful coastline in Britain.

Only three weeks ago, there was a collision in the channel; 9,000 tonnes of unleaded petrol leaked, which caused airborne pollution to rain down on large parts of England. Today, we have had disturbing reports of an illegal discharge from a vessel in the English channel; already, nearly 200 oiled birds have been found near Portsmouth.

Those disasters are but a part of the wider problem of smaller maritime accidents and spillages. In 1985, there were 366 reported oil spills in United Kingdom waters; by 1995 that figure had increased by one third to 585, with 142 incidents requiring partial or total clean-up operations. The Library brief points out that members of Lord Donaldson's inquiry were kept informed of the more significant maritime incidents, and were moved to remark that they were

"shocked to discover just how many potentially serious incidents there were."

With 8,000 miles of coastline, heavily trafficked sea lanes and often hazardous weather conditions, Britain is particularly vulnerable to the dangers that substandard vessels and human error present in an industry in which ferocious international competition is not matched by sufficiently rigorous international enforcement of standards. It is profoundly disturbing that port state control inspections show that 60 per cent. of vessels are deficient in some respect, with 6 per cent. bad enough to warrant detention.

As both unions and shipowners have repeatedly warned, the high quality provided by the British merchant fleet and its seafarers is undermined by the growth of flagging out and competition from lower-quality carriers. The decline in the British merchant fleet is such that the number of UK-owned vessels registered in the United Kingdom and dependencies has fallen to a quarter of its 1979 level. Then, we were fourth in the world in gross tonnage, with 7 per cent. of the market; now, we are 29th with barely 1 per cent. Jobs and skills have been haemorrhaging from the industry. It is clear that we need not only action on Donaldson, but action to halt and reverse the decline in the British merchant fleet.

The wider considerations—the importance of the international context and the competitiveness of the British shipping industry—have an important bearing on our consideration of the Bill. They must be reasons for taking the right action, not excuses for inaction. I am confident that the public will overwhelmingly support the measures required to improve prevention and emergency action on shipping accidents and pollution.

We welcome the main provisions of the Bill. On prevention, we welcome, subject to questions of detail, the proposals on safety standards, inspection and detention of unseaworthy vessels in UK waters, the power to move vessels on, the application of safety standards to fish transhipment ships—the so-called klondykers—and measures to improve port waste facilities. We also welcome the inclusion in the Bill of enabling powers whereby the Government can require compulsory insurance or other security for liabilities.

We do well to keep in mind the two points that Lord Donaldson made in the other place. First, he said that some form of approved contract of insurance is needed if

the requirement is not to be worthless in practice. Secondly, he said that, through international agreement if necessary, there should be a means whereby those with claims against a ship can directly enforce them against the insurer, so that a shipowner cannot simply waltz off with the money.

On the provisions for dealing with emergencies, we support the establishment of exclusion zones on grounds of safety or pollution threat, the proposed stronger powers of intervention where significant pollution may arise, and their extension to the 200-mile limit. However, we have questions on a number of areas, which we will pursue in Committee.

Clause 13 and schedule 2 provide for charges for maritime functions, including the standing costs of tackling pollution and standard setting. We understand the fears voiced by the shipping industry that unilateral application of such charges could damage the competitiveness of British ports, and we note that Lord Donaldson recommended that the Government should consult their European Union partners and others to establish a common basis for them.

The principle that the polluter and the potential polluter should pay undoubtedly makes sense, and I understand that the Government support it, but how are we to implement that principle without causing unfair disadvantage to the UK shipping industry, which is already at a fiscal disadvantage compared with many of its competitors? It would be helpful if the Minister would tell us what progress the Government have made in international discussions on this matter. It would also be useful to know whether the Government have agreed that the income from such charges should be dedicated to the maritime services for which they were levied, and by what mechanism. That was another point that Lord Donaldson pressed in the other place.

Recommendation 59 of the Donaldson report called for the identification of a limited number of marine environmental high risk areas, or MEHRAs, that ships should routinely avoid because of their particular environmental sensitivity. Unless I missed it, I was surprised that the Secretary of State did not refer to that. When the issue was raised in the other place, the Government argued that amendments to the Bill were unnecessary as identification of MEHRAs was in progress and such a measure could be implemented without further legislation. It has been almost three years since the publication of the Donaldson report, and the Government have not yet produced specific proposals. The fact that it has been suggested that Skomer, which is off the Pembrokeshire coast and near the location of the grounding of the Sea Empress, should be identified as a MEHRA clearly shows the relevance of action on this issue.

The Secretary of State may be aware of the widespread support for the proposals that has been expressed by the general public and by a range of environmental organisations. I was disappointed to read the comments of the Minister in the other place, who said in Committee that agreement on the environmental criteria was still some way off. I should like to press the Minister to confirm whether the Government are committed to the establishment of MEHRAs, and what time scale is envisaged before they are in place.

Why cannot the identification of MEHRAs complement other, wider, international developments? The International Maritime Organisation's "particularly sensitive sea areas" and the European Union's "marine environmentally sensitive areas" would complement the establishment of MEHRAs. Indeed, the latter could be candidates for the former. I urge the Government to take the lead in the designation and protection of such sites by pressing for faster progress through the IMO and the EC.

Notwithstanding the reported success of the existing voluntary routing measures, I am sure that, more than four years after the Braer disaster, none of us would want to have to confront, at some time in the future, an environmental catastrophe that could have been averted by quicker and more effective action now.

I want to press the Minister on emergency towing vessels. As Lord Donaldson said, they are an important part of the precautions that can be taken to rescue and protect vessels in difficulty. It is a cruel irony that a tug was not placed in the western approaches until eight months after the Sea Empress disaster. What is more, Donaldson proposed year-round tug provision in three key areas, and winter-only provision as a purely interim measure. The current winter-only provision is on a trial basis. When does the Minister expect the review of that cover to be complete, and what provision has been made in the public expenditure forecast for cover in future years? Although the weather plays a large part in incidents of ships in difficulty, the problems do not arise solely because of the weather, and hazardous weather is not confined to the winter.

On the control of emergency salvage operations, we welcome clause 2, which strengthens the Secretary of State's power. The Donaldson report made it clear that the buck stops with the Secretary of State: a point that he stressed in the recent debates in the other place. We note that powers of intervention were not exercised in the case of the Sea Empress. My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), whose expertise in these matters is a service to the House as well as to his constituents, has previously pointed out how crucial it is for the right level of expertise to be available to the Secretary of State, to enable him to step in effectively and early enough to safeguard the interests of the public, seafarers and the environment.

Will the Minister tell us, in response, what the contingency arrangements are, and what specialist advice and command structure stands ready at short notice to ensure the effective exercise of the powers in the Bill? It will be no good having the powers in clause 2 if they cannot be used properly.

On port waste reception facilities, we welcome the work that has already been done, and to which the Secretary of State referred, to address the problems of waste facilities and discharge requirements. I understand that about a third of the 350 UK ports and harbours have already forwarded their plans to the Marine Safety Agency.

Regulations as provided for in the Bill, and based on good practice and further consultation, seem the sensible way to proceed. Will the Minister tell us what steps the Government have taken through the EU, and otherwise

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

internationally, to ensure that this sensible measure is not a source of competitive disadvantage to our ports, especially bearing in mind the effect on port dues?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am interested in what my hon. Friend says about consultations within the EU. Does he agree that it would not be sensible for the UK to rely for the provision of tugs or air-sea rescue helicopters on the good will of other countries, irrespective of the organisation to which they belong?

Mr. Smith: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. It would not be sensible to rely on others, but that should not preclude sensible co-operation, which Donaldson specifically recommended.

The relative level of costs of using port reception facilities involves not just the EU, but the Baltic states and others. I ask the Minister to let us know what progress the Government have made in their international discussions.

On the provisions in clause 11 for local authority contingency plans for clean-up operations, what timetable does the Minister envisage for consultation with local authorities, and how does he believe compliance with a statutory duty to clean up oil spills is to be paid for? Will he examine, in conjunction with insurers, possible ways in which councils can get better and quicker reimbursement for insurance?

We should take this opportunity to praise the many coastal authorities throughout Great Britain that are currently carrying out such work on a non-statutory basis. If the Government are to impose the ends, they must say how they intend to provide the means.

We shall also press the Minister for assurances on the impact of the Bill's enabling powers of charging in clause 13 and schedule 2 on the general lighthouse fund, to which the Secretary of State referred. From the notes on clauses and ministerial responses in another place, it seems that the Government are at best anticipating European legislation, which by all accounts is some way off. As the Minister is aware, fears about the possible wider implications have been expressed in the industry and by Trinity House. He would do well to make the situation clear in his reply.

We want to examine the effect of the relative level of fines on shipowners and masters, for which clause 7 provides. It raises the magistrates fine that can be levied on each to £250,000. No one would question the need for swingeing penalties for those responsible for the illegal discharge of oil. It is right that the court should take into account the fact that a master holds an extremely responsible position on a ship and has ultimate responsibility for its day-to-day operations, but we should not forget that the master is responsible to the owner, who is his employer and who can bring considerable pressure to bear. If the fine is intended to impose on each an equal measure of responsibility, it is questionable whether the same sum is applicable, as hardly any master could pay the maximum set down in the clause, whereas some owners could. We shall pursue the matter in Committee.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John Bowis): Will the hon. Gentleman explore his thinking a little further? The amount of the fine takes into account ability to pay. If the fines were equal, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, that would enable owners to hide behind masters. Presumably, he would not want to encourage that.

Mr. Smith: We do not seek to encourage that. The question is whether it is right that the maximum should be the same in each case, or whether there should be a higher maximum for shipowners, taking account of the ability to pay. The matter is probably best pursued in Committee.

There is much to welcome in the Bill, as well as questions to be answered and issues that we want to press further. The Bill will be a step forward in maritime environmental protection, and we want it to be on the statute book before the general election. Legislation, however, is only a start. Implementation and effective enforcement will make the difference.

The British people want better protection from the hazards of marine pollution and the threat to health and the environment that it presents. Through our deliberations on the Bill, and the action that the next Government will take, we are determined to see that the British people get just that.

4.55 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): When the Secretary of State for Defence came to tell the House about the provision of a new royal yacht, he made a great speech, saying what a maritime nation we were. His ringing words were supported by the previous Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd). We were told what a noble history of maritime involvement we had and how proud we were of it, and that the new royal yacht would demonstrate our tradition and our commitment.

That is an astonishingly hollow statement from a Government who have presided consistently over the loss of tonnage and the loss of jobs in the maritime industries, which amount to a haemorrhage. It is important to understand that, although the Bill covers many complex areas of legislation, it does not begin to replace those losses.

Many of my hon. Friends will speak about environmental protection and about aspects such as port state facilities, charging and the development of action at an international level, which is essential if we are to police the seas. Before I deal with the Coastguard, a matter of grave concern to me, I want to make a wider point.

It is embarrassing for Ministers to say at the Dispatch Box that it is important for us to have cover from tugs and air-sea rescue facilities from air-sea rescue services, without making it clear that because of specific Government policies, we are becoming increasingly dependent on the good will of other nations.

One must be careful how one phrases one's views in the House of Commons. We are told, "Little Englander—you do not approve of support from any other European nation." In reality, however, the nationality of the helicopter coming to the assistance of someone in the Irish sea off the coast of west Wales may not be of material interest to him, but the time that the helicopter takes to get there and the place where it begins its journey are of enormous importance. It will not do if Belgian helicopters are the only ones available to cover many of our vital sea lanes or to have only Irish helicopters on standby when

many individuals desperately need assistance. That has happened consistently throughout the past year and is becoming more common.

More and more people are taking to the seas. As we get rid of our commercial involvement and cease to be a maritime nation—if we have not already done so to all intents and purposes—more and more people turn towards the sea for their leisure activities. They are at risk, and many of them will need assistance. It is therefore bizarre that in areas like west Wales, where RAF Brawdy was closed, the Government found themselves dependent on facilities provided not from Cornwall, as they originally said, but from Ireland and Belgium. I am happy for my grandchildren to be taught English and Welsh at school, but I did not expect them to need to be taught English, Welsh and Flemish. The Government have a direct responsibility and should make their intentions clear.

In terms of providing both tugs and air-sea rescue, the Government seem to be falling down badly on the job. One reason for that failure is that we are losing coastguards—we are losing nearly one third of the Coastguard service. Under the guise of reorganisation, coastguards are being asked to consider radical changes in the way that they work. Anyone else planning rescue services would not assume that at a time when people were using more maritime facilities, the safeguards offered to them should be cut. But that is what is happening every day.

The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis)—who is sitting on the Front Bench and who is a most courteous and gentle gentleman—told me that the Government thought it sensible to spend £1,101,768 on accountants who were being used to privatise the six trust ports. I do not know how accountants support the Coastguard service or those who need assistance at sea, or how they help the training of officers or improve facilities for our seamen, but they are being paid more than £1 million. Lawyers are cheap: they cost only £8,817 and other professions cost only £38,295. Yet we are told that there is not enough money to train, expand, or even maintain at its existing level the Coastguard service. In those circumstances, ordinary families and the ordinary constituents of every one of us will pay the price. Only when the facilities are found wanting shall we be told, "We are terribly sorry but unfortunately, owing to reorganisation, it has not been possible to provide the same level of care or cover."

If the House thinks that I am exaggerating, I should make it clear that what is being proposed will lead to a 30 per cent. change in what are called sector posts, which will downgrade maritime rescue sub-centres. It would not normally be important to talk about nomenclatures, but this is a material change. We are being asked to consider a two-tier system in the Coastguard service.

Will the Minister tell us exactly how response times will be calculated? It is clear that in the Coastguard service, unlike the ambulance service, response times are calculated in an unusual way—only from when the rescuer receives the information, not from when the call is received. We are being told that there will be a two-tier service that will consist of an initial assessment—a response to an accident—and a second provision: a rescue team. Clear evidence has already been provided from a case in Cornwall. The rescuers arrived on the scene; rescue equipment was not available to them—they had been sent to give an assessment of the situation—and a tragic accident occurred in which people lost their lives. That may have happened anyway, but one worries about policy decisions that can put people at risk.

A Coastguard instant response team may not be supplied with rescue equipment and can only report back to a rescue centre. Is that how the Minister intends to provide care in the future? What happens to response times and the care provided at incidents if a second back-up response team is required? Is the Coastguard method of calculating 999 calls unique to that service? If so, why? How many rescue vehicles are there around the countryside? Is it the Government's intention to downgrade at least four rescue stations at vital points of the United Kingdom that already have a considerable amount of work placed on them and that may be essential to the safety of human life?

This is a complicated Bill and it is horrifying that no Conservative Member is prepared to speak about it. I have strong views on the provision of insurance and various other aspects of the Bill, particularly the protection of the environment. What is important is that the Government consider the Bill to be so purely technical that it can be dealt with almost as though it were a statutory instrument—a minor matter—instead of legislation to protect every one of our constituents. That demonstrates the Government's despicable set of priorities. I am surprised that the Government are apparently going to get away with it because of the imminent general election.

The Government's approach to the Bill demonstrates only too clearly that whatever they say, their priority is not the United Kingdom's maritime history and tradition; it is not even the provision of adequate rescue services across our nation. Their priority is something much worse: an interest in how all services that have to be paid for by the taxpayer can be downgraded and how all other facilities take second place to those that can be sold off. It is a sad day and I hope that the House of Commons will take note.

5.7 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): As the people in Cornwall are all too well aware, oil tanker accidents such as the Braer and the Sea Empress can have a devastating impact on marine wildlife and local economies, whose welfare is intrinsically linked. It is not just accidents: there is clear evidence that much oil enters the sea from deliberate legal and illegal discharges. Harsh experience has taught us that prevention is better than cure. For that reason, the Liberal Democrats broadly welcome the introduction of the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill.

One of my earliest memories is arriving at the beach at Godrevy, near where my parents live in Cornwall. Instead of holidaymakers and fishermen, the fire brigade and Army were there, clearing thousands of tonnes of oil from the sand and rocks, and dead birds littered the area. The scene was due to the loss of the Torrey Canyon, and I remember the horror of it even now: it was like a depiction of a third world war. I never wanted to see it again. Yet it has recurred around the world, most recently with the Braer and Sea Empress disasters.

That is why I welcome the Bill as an opportunity further to protect our marine environment and to introduce new safeguards aimed at reducing the risk of shipping-related pollution. It promotes the sustainable

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development of our coastal communities while seeking to enhance the protection of the environment on which they rely. In the light of that, we wish to see the Bill on the statute book this side of an election. However, we also want the Bill's provisions to be tightened in some respects, for the benefit of the environment.

I should first like to draw the Minister's attention to one of the recommendations in Lord Donaldson's excellent report, "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas", and subsequently mentioned in the other place both by Lord Beaumont—the Liberal Democrats' spokesperson on environmental matters—and by Lord Clinton-Davis. The recommendation is for the designation of marine environmental high risk areas—or MEHRAs, which have already been mentioned in this debate—which are comparatively limited and highly sensitive areas that are also at risk from shipping. The purpose of designating such areas would be to inform owners, masters, insurers and charterers of key significant areas, and it is expected that simply highlighting the areas could lead to changes in behaviour—for example, by vessels taking a wider berth.

The designation concept has received widespread support among environmental organisations. Sadly, the need for such action has been reinforced by the Sea Empress incident. Although the Donaldson report stated that the European Community and the International Maritime Organisation should be encouraged to act, it considered that individual states were best placed to designate MEHRAs. Therefore, the Donaldson report gives no reason for the UK not to act unilaterally to designate such areas.

The Government have argued that restrictions on the movement of vessels can be made only through the IMO. That is of course true of action in the pollution zone—out to 200 nautical miles—but it is possible for the United Kingdom to introduce restrictions in its own territorial waters without agreement from the organisation. Such routing measures are only one of several different types of ship management measures that could be implemented within such areas to reduce pollution risks. Use of tugs as escorts, contingency planning and navigation aids are other measures that could be deployed.

The Government have, moreover, said that they are not waiting for EU proposals on the designation of marine environmentally sensitive areas to come to fruition, which indicates that Ministers accept that the UK could act unilaterally. Would the identification of MEHRAs by the Government not complement rather than conflict with wider international developments? There is no reason why such areas should not subsequently be proposed as particularly sensitive sea areas—PSSAs—to the IMO.

Rather than succumbing to fears that those areas designated by the UK for environmental protection will be quickly overtaken by international action, as the Government suggest might happen, MEHRAs should be regarded as an opportunity for the UK to take the lead in the designation and protection of such sites and in promoting that concept at the international and European levels.

The Government's Transport Minister in the other place argued that powers already exist for measures to be taken to protect such areas. However, as we have not yet heard from the Department of Transport about measures that might be under consideration or of the sites that might be identified, the House's reservations on the matter are understandable.

As we are all too well aware, ship routing continues to be reactive rather than proactive. The designation of a MEHRA provides an opportunity for the Government to be one step ahead in protecting our marine wildlife and in safeguarding the livelihoods of our coastal communities. I urge the Minister to consider the Government's position, because he would find it very hard to defend a lack of action if there were an accident in one of those potential designated areas because no action had been taken.

The second matter I should like to mention is the power to intervene in oil pollution incidents. During the Bill's passage, the Government have implemented an interim recommendation made by the marine accident investigation branch in its investigation into the Sea Empress, and I welcome that action. However, I am still concerned that the Secretary of State's power to intervene in such incidents is limited by the definition of an accident; and I refer particularly to the use of the word "imminent" as a condition of intervention. I contend that when damage is "imminent", it may well be too late to intervene.

The Government have defended their wording on the basis that removal of the word "imminent" is outside the definition that has been internationally approved. However, as I understand it, we are not obliged in domestic legislation to follow in precisely the same terms the form used in a convention. It seems pointless to implement an international convention designed to protect the marine environment if by so doing we increase the risk of damage to that environment. Let us ensure the effectiveness of any intervention by the removal of the hurdle presented by the current wording.

The third key issue that I should like to mention is that addressed by clause 5: the planning, provision and use of port waste reception facilities. I feel particularly strongly about that issue because I have seen all too clearly, as I have walked the coast around Cornwall, the problem caused by the lack of sufficient legislation. Although I welcome the Bill's provisions, there is still room to develop further the regulations on the preparation of waste management plans.

Currently, the Government of each party to the international convention for the prevention of pollution from ships of 1973 and its 1978 protocol must undertake themselves to provide, or to require ports to provide, adequate reception facilities for garbage from ships using their ports and terminals. As matters currently stand, it is voluntary for ports to provide waste facilities. I welcome the concept of waste management plans, which, if properly prepared, should lead to facilities that are both adequate and easy to use, and hence cut down on deliberate discharges into the sea—which then go on to litter our coastline. However, I am disappointed that the Bill provides only an enabling power.

I strongly believe that waste management plans must be mandatory to ensure that those ports and harbours that do not voluntarily draw up plans are required to do so.

The Department of Transport itself has acknowledged that

"the provision of"—

port reception—

"facilities is haphazard",

and that

"research by the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) has shown that 'where they exist, they can be hard to find and poorly publicised'."

The Department also stated that the

"problems would be addressed by the strict application of a waste management planning process".

Subsequently, some ports and harbours have been voluntarily producing waste management plans, and the MSA has so far received between 100 and 140 such plans; but that is out of a total of 350 ports and harbours in the UK. Another cause for concern is that the MSA does not propose to assess the adequacy of those plans. It is all too easy to implement wholly inadequate plans, and thus undermine the effectiveness of the initiative. Lord Donaldson himself recognised that concern in his report by recommending the establishment of a certification system to ensure the adequacy of waste reception facilities.

Although some scrutiny—which is a first, welcome step—is provided by a sub-group of the marine pollution action group, it is not an adequate assessment procedure. The Government argue that current developments in the EC and the IMO might require the alteration of any regulations that might be made, but they are again using potential international action as an excuse not to take any action now. Potential international action does not prevent the UK taking a lead and encouraging good practice.

The same principle applies to charging for waste reception facilities. Although recognising the need for some flexibility, Liberal Democrats support Lord Donaldson's recommendation that charges should be

"subsumed into standard port duties"

in the form of an inclusive fee. I do not believe that any other option can work effectively. Would it not be advantageous for the Secretary of State to have the power to require ports to use the inclusive fee system, if deemed appropriate, as one measure to reduce the deliberate discharge of waste? We should at least reserve the power to take action if it is shown—as I believe it will be—that other options simply are not working.

Similarly—although not advocating a universal requirement for mandatory discharge of waste from ships—I believe that it could be beneficial to enable MSA inspectors to use such a power in exceptional circumstances, such as when a vessel that is known to have illegally dumped waste before proposes to leave port with full waste tanks. The effectiveness of such a deterrent was acknowledged by Viscount Goschen in a recent letter to Lord Beaumont, which stated:

"As regards a failure to comply with a requirement to discharge waste, the best deterrent for ship operators is the threat that the ship could be detained in port, and therefore prevented from trading, until the waste has been discharged".

As both the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Marine Conservation Society have argued, such a measure would not deter responsible ship operators from entering UK ports, and I think that they are right. Rather, such a measure is targeted at those whose operations threaten the UK coastline and our waters and add to the costs of those, such as local authorities, who are responsible for cleaning up.

Those costs can be considerable. In Cornwall, the county council quotes its expenditure on cleaning non-attributable ship-sourced waste on beaches as at least £20,000 per annum. Moreover, that figure is in addition to expenditure by the six district councils, which spend no less than £30,000 per annum. Even with that level of expenditure, however, many bays are left badly polluted, and an eyesore for both visitors and locals. In practice, unless a beach is regularly used for swimming, it is unlikely that it will receive any attention. However, anyone who enjoys or walks the coastline will see the results of pollution, and, if they come close to it, they will smell the results. We are at present spending literally hundreds of millions of pounds cleaning up the discharges from people who live in Cornwall. They are paying their water bills with considerable discontent, so why should they have to put up with shipowners saving small amounts of money by discharging their waste at sea rather than at port?

While on the issue of illegal discharges, I shall touch briefly on the proposed penalties. The Bill will allow for higher maximum penalties to be imposed by magistrates for illegal discharges of garbage, oily waste and chemical waste. As I understand it, although the Bill allows the maximum fine for illegal discharges of chemicals or oil to be set at £250,000, it is Government policy to use this maximum for oil while restricting the maximum fine for chemicals to only £25,000. In a letter to my colleague Lord Beaumont, the Minister justified this position on the basis that illegal discharges from chemical tankers are rarer than those from oil tankers and that chemical tankers have lower operating costs than oil tankers. However, the pollution consequences can be at least as bad.

In view of the potential for a discharge of chemicals seriously to damage the environment, would not it be appropriate for the Government to consider setting the same maximum fine for chemicals—it is only a maximum and does not necessarily have to be employed—at £250,000? I know of no other criminal activity of which it is believed that its rarity means that the punishment should be less. Surely it is a question of how bad the activity is. After all, we would not argue that burglary should be punished more severely than murder simply because burglary is more common.

Furthermore, I have been advised by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds that aerial surveillance, as currently carried out by the marine pollution control unit, has a poor record in bringing offenders to justice. This is a key issue if we are to curtail irresponsible and environmentally detrimental behaviour. Is not it therefore appropriate that aerial surveillance be supplemented by waste auditing? This could take the form of checks of ship record books and the issuing of receipts for waste discharged in port. I suggest that the approach to waste auditing proposed by the Department of Transport should be more rigorous and that the Government should promote waste auditing in other North sea states.

Overall, the Bill could be a big step forward in ensuring safety and protecting the environment around our coastline. The Donaldson report has provided a clear way forward, but the Government have left some serious weaknesses in the legislation. I hope that the Government will feel able to reflect our spirit of co-operation by giving

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careful consideration to my suggested improvements. If so, the Bill can achieve full cross-party support, which will be good news for everyone.

5.22 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I, too, welcome the Bill. Twelve months ago next Saturday, I discovered on my doorstep one of the 20 worst oil pollution incidents to occur since we began using hydrocarbons and transporting them across our oceans. I pay tribute to all the people involved in the initial attempts to salvage the Sea Empress and to those who have been and are still working to clean up the Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire coastline. On Saturday I was in Tenby, where work is still continuing in the harbour to remove the oil that was buried about 6 ft below the sand, to ensure that when the tourists return shortly they will find the wonderful pristine environment that they used to enjoy before the Sea Empress ran aground on 15 February 1996.

It is worth recording what happened to our marine environment which, as has already been said, is one of the most sensitive and important on the United Kingdom coastline. Seventy thousand tonnes of oil were spilt from the Sea Empress over a period of only three days, although she was in serious difficulty for about six or seven days. The incident halted the inshore fishing industry for six months and cost the Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire tourist industry millions of pounds and possibly as many as 1,400 jobs in the tourist season. It radically affected or killed 7,000 sea birds and devastated particular marine habitats. A rare starfish called asterina phylactica was virtually wiped out. It is found in only seven places in the world, one of which is West Angle bay, where it was first discovered and identified. The starfish's habitat was wrecked, although it is believed that two or three surviving examples have been found.

In other words, the impact of the Sea Empress incident was devastating. It has cost millions of pounds to clean up—the process continues—and compensation claims for the fishing and tourist industries are still being made. I therefore welcome anything that will prevent such an incident from happening again, not just in my constituency but around the UK coastline or anywhere in the world.

I welcome the Bill, although I have certain criticisms of it. It does not go far enough in some respects and I shall say why later, but it is worth examining some key aspects that could be tightened in Committee.

From what we now know, it is clear that there were serious command and control problems during the salvage operation of the Sea Empress. The initial grounding was caused by human error but, from then on, there were serious problems with the salvage operation. Those issues are dealt with in clause 2. I shall quickly go through the events immediately following the vessel grounding to make it clear why we need to look carefully at command and control issues.

On the night of 15 February, the Sea Empress ran aground with 135,000 tonnes of North sea crude on board. She was refloated within three hours, and then the salvage operation began. She was held in deep water at the entrance to Milford Haven and a strategy was developed by the salvors and representatives of the Department of Transport, Coastguard, the marine pollution control unit and the Admiralty.

The salvors decided not to accept the offer of tugs, including the Department of Transport's own contracted tug based at Stornoway. Instead, they assembled a collection of tugs almost exclusively from their own fleets. The tug fleet assembled that first weekend by the salvors had a maximum bollard pull of only some 250 tonnes. It now emerges that the vessel itself, in strong tides and currents and with a very deep draught because of the initial grounding, was exercising a bollard pull of some 800 tonnes. As one pilot said to me after the incident, the tugs were not pulling the ship; the ship was pulling the tugs. I am sure that the marine accident investigation branch inquiry is considering that serious point.

That inability to control the vessel in very difficult circumstances meant that the Sea Empress finally grounded on the evening of 19 February. She had spilt only approximately 2,000 tonnes in the previous four days, but the final grounding on the night of 19 February began the massive pollution. That first night, she lost more than 30,000 tonnes of oil.

Although I welcome the fact that clause 2 gives the Secretary of State powers to intervene in an accident that could cause significant pollution, I am concerned about how the Secretary of State will exercise them. Under existing legislation, the Secretary of State has enormous powers to intervene anyway. In the case of the Sea Empress, he chose not to take that course of action.

I had a meeting with the Secretary of State on 20 February after the vessel had run aground for the final time and spilt 30,000 tonnes of oil that night. I asked him, as any constituency Member of Parliament would, why he had not used his powers to intervene. He was very frank, saying that he had been told that the salvor, Smit Tak, was world-class—indeed it is—and that he did not have the expertise to overrule its decisions. I understand that, but if we tell our constituents that we are giving the Secretary of State important powers of intervention, we must ensure that he can exercise the powers sensibly and rationally. Unfortunately, the necessary expertise is not available to the Secretary of State to enable him to take control of a salvage operation, such as that of the Sea Empress, which so tragically went wrong.

It is clear from what the Secretary of State told me that morning that he did not know where to find the expertise. If clause 2 is to have a meaningful effect, the Government must either employ salvage experts directly or contract that expertise. When there is a significant possibility of pollution, the expertise should be immediately available to the Secretary of State to enable him to make a judgment on whether the salvors are the right people. A deal could be signed with the owners of a passing tug, who might not be suitable for a major salvage operation. Alternatively, the salvors may be world-class but, because of financial or commercial pressures, they may make decisions that do not benefit the environment, which everyone wants protected.

Clause 12 and schedule 2 refer to the possibility of the Secretary of State introducing a levy on the shipping industry to fund preventive measures. That should include not only the work of the marine pollution control unit but, most important, the cost of emergency towing vessels. We already have a levy on oil movements in 68 nations—the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund levy—which operates well. However, it seems illogical that that system works only when pollution has occurred. It is a

case of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. We do not have a levy to fund the stationing of powerful emergency towing vessels around the coast of the United Kingdom and elsewhere. That is clearly what Donaldson advocates in recommendation 96. I appreciate that the best way forward would be a European or worldwide levy, but I have a feeling that we shall have to wait a long time for that. Lord Donaldson clearly considered the issue a priority. The Government should consider a unilateral levy.

Lord Donaldson's view was that, with the emergency towing vessels that would be required in key areas and the extra equipment for the marine pollution control unit, the total annual cost would be £10 million. Considering the amount that this country has received from North sea assets alone and the profits that have been made by the producers—much of the produce does not even touch the United Kingdom coastline, passing on to north America, to Baltic countries that are not part of the European Union, or to other European ports—the cost, even if £10 million is an underestimate, is very small. The Government should not be too concerned that an industry the size of the oil industry might not be able to afford that estimated £10 million. If we can have a fund or levy to ensure adequate clean-up, surely we can have one to ensure adequate prevention.

Lord Donaldson also made recommendations about emergency towing vessels. In chapter 20, at paragraph 127, he said clearly that he saw three main areas of concern where there should be emergency towing vessels: the Dover straits, for the obvious reason that it is the busiest marine traffic route in the world; north-west Scotland, where the Braer got into difficulty and where there is a great deal of large tanker traffic moving from the North sea down the west coast of Britain to more southern European ports or across the Atlantic to north American ports; and the western approaches. He asked for year-round cover and said that in the interim—from the winter of 1994–95—emergency towing vessels should be based in Dover, Falmouth and Stornoway. That did not happen. Winter-only cover was provided for Dover and north-west Scotland.

One of the tragedies of the Sea Empress incident is that there was clearly a serious shortage of tug power, as I explained earlier, and there was no emergency towing vessel in the western approaches, as Lord Donaldson had recommended. Such a vessel could have had a significant impact on the outcome of the salvage operation. It is ironic that last week, the vessel that has now been positioned in the western approaches, again for the winter only, paid a courtesy visit to Milford Haven. The vessel arrived on station eight months after the Sea Empress ran aground.

Having taken on board so many of the Donaldson recommendations, we should address the key issue of year-round emergency towing cover in strategic positions around the coast. It is naive of the Government to believe that, outside the winter period from 1 October to 31 March, vessels do not lose their engines, have problems with steering, suffer from human error, have an explosion or fire on board or get into other difficulties.

The Rosebay incident in Lyme bay is an example. A large crude carrier was run into by a relatively small fishing vessel and 1,500 tonnes of fuel oil caused serious pollution along the south coast. That happened during the summer months. Incidents happen all year round' so it is nonsense to be prepared to provide cover only during the winter months.

Following Lord Donaldson's recommendations, Coastguard commissioned Captain Belton to look specifically at the issue of emergency towing vessels. His report, published in May 1995, stated clearly that we should definitely have year-round cover in Dover, the western approaches and north-west Scotland. Yet again the Government did not heed the recommendation, and we ended up with winter-only arrangements—and no arrangements in the western approaches, where the Sea Empress ran aground. Many professionals believe that if the tug had been there, as recommended by both Captain Belton and Lord Donaldson, the outcome in that instance might well have been different.

Clause 12 gives local authorities a duty to maintain contingency plans. That was important at the time when I was on Dyfed county council's public protection committee, given that Dyfed contained one of the busiest ports not only in the United Kingdom, but in Europe and, indeed, the world. The emergency planning department carried out its voluntary responsibilities in relation to contingency plans very well, and a series of exercises took place regularly to test them. I believe that the undoubted success of that clean-up operation resulted from good contingency planning. The department knew what equipment was required, and which contractors were available to provide that specialist equipment; it had carried out practice exercises, and had call-out facilities, rotas and a large body of staff to carry out the work that was required. I can only commend, as I did at the beginning of my speech, the actions taken by local councils, especially as they were on the cusp of reorganisation which made their task rather difficult at times.

What worries me is that, in giving local authorities a statutory duty to produce contingency plans, we are not giving them the wherewithal with which to implement them. The Government should think seriously about a way of ensuring that authorities are given enough money to carry out preparatory exercises, and also that money is available for emergencies.

It is four years since the Braer ran aground in January 1993, but Shetland council has received back hardly a penny of the £1.5 million or so that it spent at the time. I believe that nearly £1 million has been paid, through the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund, to local authorities that were involved in the Sea Empress clean-up operation, but a considerable sum is still outstanding. I understand that the cost of the operation to date has been well over £5 million, and the cost is on-going. It is worrying, when local authorities are under huge financial pressures, that they do not have the resources to deal with sudden emergencies. Is there not some way of ensuring that, at such times, funds are made available to them directly?

Let me say something about illegal—and legal—oil discharges. As other speakers have pointed out, it is often not the major incident that causes many of the problems. Recent incidents in the channel—or off Flamborough head, for example—have had a catastrophic impact, especially on sea birds. Because such incidents have a cumulative effect, however—I am talking about relatively small incidents that are happening week after week—they may not hit the headlines in the same way as major

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disasters. I welcome the moves proposed in the Bill to ensure that ports produce proper plans to tackle the problem of waste reception facilities; I hope that that will radically reduce the number of illegal discharges. I also hope that the carrot-and-stick approach suggested in the Bill will work.

As the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) suggested—as did I, in an intervention on the Secretary of State—we need to deal with one strange anomaly. Apparently, chemical spillages are for some reason 10 times less serious, or less deserving of severe penalties, than oil spillages. That issue must be clarified in Committee. We also need to ensure that no real financial penalty is imposed on owners of vessels who wish to use port reception facilities, as opposed to those who may wish to start cutting corners. I approve of the idea of including the charge in port dues: if there is an overall charge, people will feel that, as they must pay for the facilities anyway, they may as well use them.

In my experience, very few of the vessels that use Milford Haven—in fact, none of the oil tankers—call at facilities owned and operated by the port authority; they use private refinery jetties. When we are assessing waste reception facilities, we must not simply expect the competent harbour authority to say, "We have a contingency fund." We must ensure that private owners—mostly jetty owners, throughout the United Kingdom—also provide reception facilities, and that shipping owners are not charged twice, first by the oil refinery and secondly in the form of port dues.

Much has been said today about the marine environmental highrisk areas. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) mentioned, one of the MEHRAs that was identified after the Donaldson inquiry was immediately outside Milford Haven, around the Pembrokeshire islands of Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm. I think that the Government must now start moving much more quickly in designating MEHRAs and ensuring that they are properly protected.

At the time of the Sea Empress disaster—and the running aground of the Borga a few months earlier, on 29 October—the radar that was supposed to cover the entrance to Milford Haven was not working, and had not been working for some months. It is still not working properly. The point is, however, that, whether it was working or not, the radar cover did not include that MEHRA. Proper protection of high-risk areas does not just mean drawing a line on a chart; it means ensuring that someone is monitoring those areas. The only way of doing that is through radar cover that is linked with either a port or a Coastguard station—and, if that is to be done properly, there will be cost implications.

I welcome the Bill, and will be pleased to serve on the Committee, for a specific reason: I do not want what happened to my constituency to happen anywhere else.

5.48 pm

Sir James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The Bill goes a long way towards attaining the objectives of the Donaldson report. It was considerably amended, and improved, in another place, where debate on it was greatly helped by the expert knowledge of many who participated. Indeed, the same is true of today's debate. However, success will be achieved only when a much higher percentage of ships entering British waters are British-owned and, to a great extent, British-manned.

The Secretary of State's Department at all levels is only too well aware of the difficulties, for example, in communicating with foreign ships that do not have on the bridge one officer who is capable of understanding English. I concede that the Department is to a great extent denied the power to change that position in regard both to ownership and to manning, but power does lie elsewhere.

The Capital Allowances Act 1990 contains provisions concerning what is called "first year allowance". All that is now required is a new provision establishing a 100 per cent. first year allowance for expenditure in regard to investment in ships. That modest change would begin to reverse the current position, in which more than 80 per cent. of ships entering British waters are foreign-owned. Their owners not only disregard the rule book, but do not even bother to read it. There is widespread support for such an amendment to the Finance Bill, giving effect to that modest concession in the present Parliament, and then we can get on with it.

While such a change is taking effect, safety at sea could be enhanced by the compulsory provision of transponders on all ships entering British waters. Something of that nature was suggested in the Donaldson report. It is reflected in the Department's thinking.

There is reference in Donaldson, I think, to large identification signs. I cannot believe that they were seriously meant to give 24-hour coverage, given the hours of darkness and inclement weather, with which my honourable colleague, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), was so concerned, particularly in relation to preserving what is left of the Coastguard organisation. The transponders would be much more effective and much more in line, when we think about it, with aircraft tracking systems, which are accepted nowadays as absolutely essential.

The provision in clause 1 for placing an exclusion zone around a shipping casualty is to be welcomed. I hope that the exclusion will apply also to the news industry, because the intrusion in a crisis of aircraft, helicopters and non-authorised vessels can and does hamper rescue operations, and, in those circumstances, greatly increases the risk of fire. After all, such exclusion need be only brief, because the news industry usually becomes bored in a short time with any sensation, even one of its own manufacture.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) touched on another Donaldson recommendation—which is included, I think, in clause 12—laying on local authorities certain responsibilities. It is a vague phrase, and I think that the hon. Gentleman and I would like to be clear whether it also involves financial responsibilities. If so, it would seem unfair that a local authority covering a very vulnerable part of our coastline should be saddled with financial responsibility when, for example, another local authority in the midlands would get off scot free; so there is surely a strong case for financial liability to be a national responsibility.

Clause 10 is an essential element. The Department's powers should not be in doubt. Mention of that gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Transport, his Ministers, his Department, the Marine Safety Agency and the Coastguard for the very effective

co-operation on the Sea Empress after the two spillages. I also pay tribute to the Department for its sound decisions in regard to the subsequent removal of the seriously damaged vessel—and seriously damaged it undoubtedly was.

I had the horrifying experience of standing in the dry dock underneath the Sea Empress when she was completely pumped out. It was like looking up into a vast cathedral with nothing obstructing one's view in the way of a hull. The wonder of it is that the ship was able to be moved at all. It is a tribute to the sound judgment—there is more to this than the general public would know—of the Secretary of State and his Ministers, who ensured that there was not a third disaster in connection with the vessel.

I did not consider it necessary to declare an interest earlier, as mine is a landlocked constituency. That is not mitigated by the constituency taking its name from the River Lagan, which admittedly makes its way to the sea at the point where there are modern docks on one side of the channel and the Harland and Wolff shipyard on the other. The shipyard is still open to do business, and is in a strong position to construct new ships, the demand for which will, I hope, be generated by the Bill.

5.55 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux) did not feel it necessary to declare a constituency interest, but I feel it necessary to do just that, for three reasons.

First, my constituency is almost completely surrounded by sea, sticking out, as it does, into the western approaches. Secondly, I happen to be the president—a paid job, I hasten to add—of the Sea Safety Group. Thirdly, I was also the sponsor of predecessor legislation, the Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Pollution) Act 1994. But perhaps the biggest interest I have to declare is the first one, as my constituency is by the sea and is the site of perhaps the first of the great environmental disasters, the Torrey Canyon, which foundered off the Isles of Scilly in my constituency in 1967.

I suppose that we have learnt many lessons since then, but, as the experience of the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) has shown, perhaps we have not learnt all the lessons from the years between the Torrey Canyon disaster and the foundering of the Sea Empress. During the passage of the Act that I sponsored, Opposition Members somehow had the idea that we could construct measures that would cure the problem for all time, and remove all risk. Of course, sadly, it is not like that.

We learn from each succeeding disaster, and try to prevent others. We will never, however, achieve a perfect state of legislation. Even if we did, many disasters are the result of human failing, so we can never legislate with compete satisfaction to remove the risk of such disasters. We must, however, continue to do our best, so I welcome the Bill as another attempt to do that, which helps to implement some of the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's weighty report, "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas".

The Donaldson report describes the geographical position of the Isles of Scilly:

"The Isles of Scilly are another group of beautiful and ecologically sensitive islands located at a shipping crossroads."

He referred to the weight of shipping that passes the islands. He went on to say that his committee was

"not convinced that the TSSs"—

traffic separation schemes—

"and ITZs"

inshore traffic zones—

"between them provide enough protection for the Isles of Scilly".

He said that the islands were "an obvious candidate" for marine environmental highrisk area status, and added:

"The Department of Transport should consider the options."

It is a matter of great disappointment to me and the islanders, my constituents, that no action has been taken to follow up that recommendation.

As Lord Donaldson said, the Isles of Scilly need added protection. The council of the isles has for some time urged that there should be some exclusion zone around the islands, to prevent another Torrey Canyon. While the Donaldson committee was deliberating, there was something of a near-miss involving a tanker. Fortunately, it did not result in disaster, but the risk is always there.

Some hon. Members will know that, ever since I became a Member of Parliament, I have deplored the way in which Coastguard stations have been removed—in fact, I made my maiden speech on the issue. I can claim that I managed to hold on to the last of the visual watch Coastguard stations in the country, which were in my constituency. Alas, they were also removed a few years ago. I was a founder trustee of National Coastwatch, which was set up to put in place on a voluntary basis a number of visual watches around the coastline. Those volunteers are doing excellent work.

As the hon. Member for Pembroke said, if we are to implement the measures outlined by Lord Donaldson, it is necessary in the areas concerned to have a very close watch by radar, and, I suggest, a visual watch. We cannot afford to allow these accidents to happen, and sometimes they can be prevented when coastguards or volunteers see a vessel literally heading for the rocks. That has happened in the past, and warnings have been given. One of my fears about the removal of visual watches is that we will deny ourselves the opportunity of preventing accidents in that way.

I also warmly endorse the plea of the hon. Member for Pembroke on the stationing of a deep-water tug in the western approaches all year round. I believe that that is absolutely essential, for the reasons given by Lord Donaldson, and following our experiences with the Sea Empress.

I welcome the Bill, although I do not think that it is the end of the story. I am sure that our successors in this place will return to the issue over the years—partly, I suspect, because there will be further disasters such as the Braer. I see that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who suffered that disaster, is in the Chamber. The House must do more to close the loopholes which undoubtedly exist. I return to my plea: perhaps we should put the clock back and return to visual watches in those parts of the coastline which are most at risk.

6.3 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): May I point out to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) that many Opposition Members

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

welcomed the Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Pollution) Act 1994? We have sufficient experience of the fishing industry to know that, occasionally, vessels are overwhelmed in utterly natural circumstances, and we are well aware of the dangers facing our merchant seamen and fishermen.

I am pleased to see the Bill's emphasis on accident prevention measures, but it is important that, in designating exclusion zones, we do not lose local fishing sites. Damage would be caused if fishermen were to be excluded from traditional fishing grounds, but I am sure that officials will take account of the concerns of fishermen. The Secretary of State is not here, but I readily acknowledge his concern about enhanced safety regulations.

Will the crews of emergency vessels be equipped with immersion suits—sometimes called survival suits? If they are involved in such work, they should be provided with every piece of safety equipment available, and I think that a survival suit is essential. I have long campaigned for the crews of our fishing vessels to be equipped with survival suits. Sometimes, officials and Ministers think that I am talking about suits for fishermen to wear while they are working on deck, but that is not the case. The kind of survival suit to which I am referring is one which a crew member dons when the ship is foundering.

Let me give an example. A few years ago, a French stern trawler with a crew of 27 foundered off the coast of St. Kilda. She went down quite quickly, and the men on watch had time to put on their survival suits. Out of a crew of 27, 14 men were on watch and had time to slip on their survival suits. Every one of them survived—despite being in heavy seas off St. Kilda in February—and the men were rescued as a result of the remarkable efficiency and bravery of a helicopter crew from Lossiemouth. The poor crew members who were down in their bunks did not have a chance to put on their survival suits, and they quickly died—as one would expect in northern waters at that time of the year. That is a stark example of what happens when a man goes into the water without a survival suit.

I make no apology for continuing my campaign, because I do not believe that any UK-registered fishing vessel should be allowed to leave port without a survival suit on board for each member of the crew. I have been criticised by fishermen's associations for that campaign, but the father of a young fisherman who drowned not so long ago after going overboard from a Scottish fishing vessel now says that he wishes his son had been able to don one of those suits.

I am pleased that, at long last, we will have regulations governing the klondykers—the floating fish-processing plants which play an important role in the Scottish fishing industry. Fishermen anchored in Loch Broom ship their mackerel on to these ships. This work is done mainly at Ullapool, but also takes place in Shetland. As someone who comes from a fishing family and who made his first trip to the Arctic at the age of 11, I must say that I would not sale across the Clyde in some of the vessels seen at Loch Broom. They are a disgrace to the nation under whose flag they fly. I am pleased to note that the Bill will introduce tougher regulations on maritime hygiene and safety.

On the issue of criminal proceedings against the owners and captains of vessels who infringe the rules, can the Minister confirm that, in the Scottish courts, the local procurator fiscal would refer such cases to the sheriff court? I am sure that the Minister will be keen to answer that question.

On the question of the Minister and his officials taking note of the concerns of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Government's measures are welcome. Some would say that the Government's relationship with the Coastguard and the RNLI is somewhat theoretical, but they have made an important gesture to the RNLI. Together with the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), I represent the House on the executive committee of the RNLI, so I welcome those measures.

I have asked the Secretary of State—I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm the point later—whether the pilot of a ship acts as an adviser and guide to the master of the vessel. When a pilot is taken on board a ship—for example, when a ship enters the firth of Clyde—I understand that the ship is not under his control, and the master remains in command of his vessel at all times, even when the pilot is on board.

Lord Donaldson dealt at length with the subject of the Minch in his report. Incidentally, Lord Donaldson, as he himself pointed out recently, is not the sole author of his brilliant report. I have long argued that very large vessels—such as very large crude carriers and ultra large crude carriers—should stand to the west of the Western Isles. Lord Donaldson recommends that, in exceptional weather, such ships should be allowed into the Minch.

I disagree; that is the one criticism I have made of the Donaldson report. Big ships, especially in bad weather, should stand in deep water and not in relatively shallow water, especially waters that are so important to our fishing communities on the west coast of Scotland. There is a deep-water route to the west of the Western Isles—as the Minister knows, because he has heard me complain about the subject before—and that is the way that the largest vessels should take. The route lies to the west of North Uist, Harris and Lewis. It might add three or four hours' steaming time, but that is the vessels' problem and not that of the communities in the beautiful area around the Minch.

In their report, Lord Donaldson and his colleagues said the deep-water route was

"the only one in UK waters established for environmental reasons."

My concerns about the Minch are shared by many people in Scotland. For example, a letter to Members of Parliament from Councillors Michael Foxley, William Fulton and John Munro states:

"The Highland Council and the Western Isles Islands Council have serious concerns over the current arrangements for managing the movement of tanker traffic transiting the north west of Scotland".

The letter continues:

"A recent survey of shipping through the Minch over a two month period saw 456 vessels pass through the Minch, 25 per cent. of which did so improperly."

By "improperly", the councillors mean that those vessels failed to report their positions to the Coastguard and some of them failed to stick to the designated channels. Such failures might lead to a serious accident in those important fishing areas.

The councillors continue:

"Taking into account that less than 20 per cent. of the total number of vessels using the Minch were UK registered and therefore less familiar with the specific dangers of local waters, there are very real concerns that an accident is waiting to happen."

Those douce highlanders make a good point, and I hope to address it further, if I am fortunate enough to serve on the Committee. I might get the thumbs down from the Whips Office, but I hope not.

I know a skipper who put a big stern trawler ashore in the Minch, because he thought its turning circle was smaller than it was. It was only 750 gross registered tonnes. What will happen to the tankers and other big ships that carry hazardous materials through that narrow channel? I suggest to the Minister that he pays close attention to some of the proposals made by the two councils. For example, they suggest the introduction of a compulsory Coastguard reporting scheme for all shipping moving through the Minch. It is obvious that the voluntary scheme is ineffective. The letter also contains proposals to

"sustain the current practice of directing all laden vessels over 10,000 gross tonnage to the deep water route to the west of the Western Isles".

The councillors also suggest that, if vessels over 10,000 gross tonnage pass through the Minch at times of severe weather, they should do so only under the authority of a qualified pilot. That is a reasonable suggestion. They say that vessels under 10,000 gross tonnage with hazardous cargo should be treated as if they were over 10,000 gross tonnage. We also need, as suggested by the councillors, measures to secure the permanent provision of an emergency towing vessel of sufficient capacity based in Stornoway. One is stationed there in the winter, but, as we know, ships founder in other seasons.

Clause 18 deals with general lighthouse authorities. It provides that a general lighthouse authority may use any of its assets that have spare capacity, after discharging its functions to manage and maintain all navigational aids, and enter into an agreement, with the consent of the Secretary of State, to exploit that spare capacity. I presume that that means the Secretary of State for Transport, but the Secretary of State of Scotland also has an important role to play.

For example, the Pharos—the northern lighthouse vessel which was launched from Ferguson's in Port Glasgow and entered service in early 1993—is presumably one of the assets that can be used elsewhere. I suggest that it could be used, as it has been in the past, as a reserve vessel for the Britannia, especially when the royal family visit parts of Scotland, including the Western Isles, in the performance of their duties. Written answers on 31 January 1997 show that the Queen used the royal yacht for a total of 46 days in 1995 and 1996. When the Queen visits the Western Isles and other points of the compass, the Pharos might be used. It is a very fine ship, and I speak as an ex-shipwright. It was built in my constituency to the highest of standards. It is a first-class ship and it could be used by the royal family instead of spending £60 million on a replacement vessel.

I welcome the Bill. I hope that some amendments will be introduced that will, in my humble view—I am as modest as the hon. Member for St. Ives—improve it. I can think of some at this moment. In terms of enhanced safety and accident prevention measures the Bill ought, however, to be welcomed by everyone present.

6.19 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I also ought to declare a constituency interest as I live in and represent an area on the south bank of the Forth, in closed waters. When I listened to the powerful and detailed speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) and his description of the Sea Empress, I could not help but feel that there but for the grace of God might we have gone. There was a near accident at Aberdour and, in closed waters, the results would have been catastrophic.

When I listened to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), it occurred to me to ask why, in the past 30 years since the Torrey Canyon, we seem to have made so little progress. It is not as if British Governments have been run by people who were uninterested in the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) will recollect that the Prime Minister of the time had his holiday house in the Scilly Isles. Indeed, so much did he love those islands that he is buried there. Harold Wilson cared enormously about this issue. His Conservative successor, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), is not exactly uninterested in things maritime. Nevertheless, successive Governments—not only those under the leadership of those two Prime Ministers—have not made the progress that one might have expected.

The Bill—indeed, any Bill on the subject—is particularly welcome, therefore. I must point out to the Minister, without antagonism, however, that in such a debate Ministers should listen to their parliamentary colleagues when they are saying more or less the same thing. We are saying—the Opposition Front Bench, my colleagues and the hon. Member for St. Ives—that there should be mandatory provisions for port waste reception facilities, with mandatory port waste management plans.

I should like to hear in the reply to the debate, or in Committee—preferably in the reply—what on earth is the objection to mandatory provisions. When I intervened on the Secretary of State—he will forgive me if I have got him wrong—he said that he was against mandatory legislation. Equally, he seemed to be against mandatory discharge of waste by visiting ships coupled with charging for reception facilities by an inclusive fee system.

Such mandatory provisions are the considered view of a number of those who know a lot about such things, not least the Marine Conservation Society, of which I am a member. Indeed, I took part in its "Beachwatch 1996" survey and cleaned up a great many plastics and other things under the Forth bridge on that rather cold and windy autumn day.

Can the Minister tell us what the objection is and why the Government are unwilling to accept mandatory provisions? There must be some objection, but we cannot divine it. Have they been given some legal advice? What is it?

On 28 January, I asked the Secretary of State

"what assessment he has made of the impact of the Merchant Shipping Regulations 1988 in reducing marine debris."

His answer was:

"Surveys by and on behalf of the Marine Safety Agency have shown that the waste reception facilities provided by harbour authorities pursuant to the Merchant Shipping (Reception Facilities for Garbage) Regulations 1988 are generally adequate."

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Frankly, they are not adequate and they never have been. They were not adequate 30 years ago, when I was a member of the Mikardo committee. My best advice, in preparing for the debate, was that they are still not adequate. The Minister should not have continued:

"It is therefore difficult to make a specific assessment of the effect of the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Pollution by Garbage) Regulations 1988 in isolation from other legislation relating to pollution of the marine environment from both shipping and land-based sources."

I also asked whether the Secretary of State would

"set up a public register of legal notices, offences and fines relating to pollution of the marine environment from shipping."

The departmental reply was:

"The Government already publish details of vessels prosecuted for marine pollution offences and vessels which have been reported to their flag states for suspected pollution offences. We do not intend to introduce a public register."

That course of action has not been effective and it is not sufficient to say:

"We do not intend to introduce a public register."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. *128*.]

There is a good case for such a register. Legal notices and details of offences and fines relating to pollution of the marine environment by shipping should be kept on a public register and so be subject to legitimate public scrutiny. The combination of requiring records to be kept, and the prospect of public scrutiny, would secure greater use of port reception facilities for oil and rubbish by visiting ships. The pollution regulation of the shipping industry would also be brought into line with terrestrial industry in terms of access to environmental information.

For the register to act as a reliable and effective pollution deterrent, it should be comprehensive, regularly and routinely updated and available for public scrutiny at all reasonable times and at reasonable cost. That is a pretty reasonable proposition. I hope that the Government will reconsider a public register before the Bill goes to the Standing Committee.

I also hope that the Government will reconsider having garbage record books. There is a lack of prosecutions for the illegal disposal of plastics at sea primarily because the Marine Safety Agency has insufficient evidence to take legal action. Evidence to bring a case to court could be obtained if there was proof that a vessel did not have the appropriate amount of waste on board for its size and the length of time spent at sea. It is for that purpose that the use of garbage record books should be implemented as soon as possible.

Garbage record books would record each day the volume, description and type of garbage arising from the normal operation of the ship. They would record the date and time, and the volume, description and type of garbage placed into reception facilities at named UK ports. They would also record the date, volume and the method of disposal of any garbage from the ship, by whatever means. Every garbage record book would be made available to the relevant authorities in subsequent ports visited. The books could be inspected and copied on to a public register. Easy access to that register would allow public scrutiny of the environmental practices of ships and ship operators going through UK and other ports. In turn, that would act as a deterrent to bad environmental practice, while allowing ships that operated in an environmentally sensitive way the opportunity to profit from the good publicity provided by good environmental practices.

That is the view of the Marine Conservation Society and others, but it is also my deep, personal conviction. Unlike almost all other hon. Members, I spent two years at sea as a seconded employee of P and O. Going into ports, and at sea, one sees exactly what happens: crews are casual and take the easy way out; blind eyes are turned; skippers are not all that fussy; and even the most rigorous captains cannot be on top of the situation all the time.

Something must be done if we are to be at all effective. As my hon. Friends have said, it costs a great deal less to nip the problem in the bud than to clean up the beaches afterwards. I emphasise the importance of easy-to-use reception facilities. Waste management plans should be introduced as primary legislation in the Bill and not in the form of its current enabling powers, to ensure that all ports prepare adequate plans without further delay.

The Department has stated that the problems would be addressed by the strict application of a waste management planning process. In Committee, we should like to hear more details of precisely what the Department has in mind for that process. The initiative is a welcome first step, but the Bill does not deliver the system of certification of all waste reception facilities that was called for in recommendation 27 of the Donaldson report. People in the Marine Conservation Society who have considered the matter would be keen for the Environment Agency to be given the responsibility for reviewing and deeming adequate those waste management plans.

I mentioned the inclusive fee during the Secretary of State's speech; he was most courteous about giving way. While the inclusive fee system is probably most appropriate for garbage and non-cargo oily waste, such as bilge water, oily waste from cargo tanks is likely to be more voluminous and specialised and therefore to cost more than an inclusive fee system could easily cope with. However, the need for an inclusive fee system is highlighted by Lord Donaldson in recommendation 27(e), and it is clear that a shipowner or master is more likely to use the facilities for which a fee has already been paid. That is human nature.

I hope that something will be said in Committee about the impact on wildlife. The full impact of marine debris on marine species is difficult to assess because of the limited research and the fact that sampling is largely confined to land-based observations. Research so far has primarily measured frequency of interaction rather than assessing the proportion of a species that is affected.

Marine debris can directly harm wildlife as a result of entanglement and ingestion. It is estimated that more than 1 million birds and 100,000 marine mammals and sea turtles die each year from entanglement in, or ingestion of, plastics. Of the 115 species of marine mammal, 47 are known to become entangled in or to ingest marine debris. In Committee, we can discuss the various hazards presented to marine life by such debris.

I hope that, whatever else the Minister leaves to be dealt with in Committee, he will explain to the House what on earth the objection is to introducing mandatory provisions for the crucial reception facilities at our ports. He owes us that explanation this evening.

6.34 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said, the Bill is vital and welcome, and the Labour party supports its measures.

We regret the fact that it has taken not one but two serious marine pollution disasters finally to convince the Government of the need for the legislation; a need underlined yet again today by the incident in the English channel that was referred to by my hon. Friends the Members for Oxford, East and for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody).

We also regret the fact that it has taken the Government almost three years to bring before the House Lord Donaldson's highly praised and respected inquiry into the first of those disasters. We accept that, despite the apparent complacency and the delays that have preceded its publication, the Bill will go at least part of the way towards creating the safer ships and cleaner seas that were the aim of Lord Donaldson's recommendations.

However, many aspects of the Bill still require further explanation from Ministers, who will also have to justify a number of omissions. Many of those aspects and omissions were highlighted not only by my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich, for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger), for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), but by the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) and by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux).

In addition, many informed and probing interventions from my hon. Friends were courteously allowed by the Secretary of State, in the most marked contrast with the fact that, with the exception of those on the Front Bench and the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), no Conservative Member has been present to hear, let alone contribute to, this evening's important debate.

The Bill was a golden opportunity for the Government at least to begin to address the appalling decline in Britain's merchant fleet that has characterised their 18 years in office. The figures have been well rehearsed, but they are none the less staggering.

Since 1979, the United Kingdom merchant fleet has declined by 24 million tonnes, or approximately 65 per cent. of its former size. According to Lloyd's, Britain now ranks 22nd in the table of world trading fleets, behind nations such as Malta, Turkey, Italy and St. Vincent. Under the present Government, more merchant tonnage has been lost from the British fleet than was lost by all the allied forces in all theatres in the second world war.

The figures are damning in themselves, but they are also directly related to the issues that we have been debating today, because the dramatic decline in the United Kingdom register has been matched by an equally dramatic increase in the use of flags of convenience.

Opposition Members are proud to acknowledge that British shipping has one of the best safety records in the world, but as more and more of our vessels are forced to flag out and more and more of our goods are transported by vessels over which we have only limited jurisdiction, that safety record is undermined and the threat to our coastline increases.

The decline of our merchant fleet also has serious economic implications. According to the Chamber of Shipping, since 1979, the gross earnings of the British merchant fleet have declined from £9.8 billion to £4.7 billion per annum. In 1975, the sea transport account of the UK balance of payments was in surplus. Under the present Government, that surplus has been allowed to slip into deficit. That decline in earnings represents lost investment not only to the nation but to the maritime industry, which could have a serious knock-on effect in terms of pollution and safety.

It has been well documented that the majority of maritime casualties involve vessels of 14 years or older, with more than 90 per cent. of vessels lost at sea being 15 years or older. Similarly, poor maintenance of vessels is widely agreed to be a major contributory factor to shipping accidents. The 1995 European port state control report states:

"Most of the defects discovered could have been avoided if proper maintenance had been carried out."

The decline under the Government of Britain's merchant fleet and the ascendancy of flags of convenience that has accompanied it cannot be divorced from maritime safety and pollution. Those issues constitute an omission from the Bill that we intend to address both in Committee and on Report. Equally worrying is the Government's reluctance to confront crewing and crew training. The Donaldson report concluded that human factors are responsible for almost 80 per cent. of maritime casualties. Similarly, the 1992 National Audit Office study concluded:

"Operational failure and human error are the main cause of the majority of accidents to ships".

Despite the importance of highly trained seafarers to securing high standards of maritime safety, British shipping faces a manpower crisis. The number of British officers employed by British shipping companies has declined by 75 per cent. since 1979. According to the Chamber of Shipping, it is set to decline by a further 30 per cent. over the next decade. Despite warnings about the disastrous impact of falling numbers of seafarers and seafarer cadets, the Government spend less on support for seafarer training than on their ministerial car fleet. We believe that it is impossible to confront the issue of maritime safety without examining crewing. Again, we shall press the Government on that in Committee and on Report.

The Bill's measures to protect the environment and tackle pollution are welcome, but we have several concerns about pollution prevention matters. It is disappointing that there appears to be nothing in the Bill to address the problems surrounding the detection of vessels responsible for pollution. According to the latest figures that I have been able to obtain, which relate to a survey conducted by the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers between June and September 1995, in the 139 oil pollution incidents reported around the UK, only three of the offending ships were detected. Similarly in 1995, only 37 vessels were detained in UK ports on suspicion of involvement in illegal discharges of oil and hazardous chemicals; of those, only 11 cases were referred to the Treasury Solicitor for possible prosecution, while 19 were reported to their flag state.

While we accept that unilateral action on the inspection and detention of foreign-flagged vessels is difficult because of the impact on competitiveness and on British seafarers forced by the decline of the British fleet to serve

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

on such vessels, what action is being taken at European and international level to agree tighter regulations for the frequency and thoroughness of port state control inspections?

Equally, we believe that the Government should take a strong stance to protect Britain's fishing grounds from the problems of fish transhipment in the form of the so-called klondykers. We welcome the Government's proposed measures to tackle the problem and the Secretary of State's reference to it. However, we are not yet convinced that those measures go far enough and we shall explore the matter in Committee and on Report.

As I said, many of the Bill's measures respond to Lord Donaldson's report, which was itself a response to the Braer grounding of January 1993. Since then, the Government have been somewhat overtaken by events. We welcome the fact that Ministers have been flexible enough to insert several measures that clearly respond to the Sea Empress disaster. The details of that, and the continuing concerns, were graphically described by my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke. We welcome the measures as far as they go, but we seek further assurances from Ministers. In particular, we want an assurance that the process of salvage by committee which allowed an accident to turn into farce and then disaster will never be repeated. We shall certainly seek assurances that Ministers will never again place responsibility for the co-ordination of a major maritime rescue operation in the hands of a chef from a local Chinese takeaway restaurant.

I reiterate the request of my hon. Friends the Members for Oxford, East, for Pembroke, for Greenock and Port Glasgow and for Crewe and Nantwich that the Minister here and now confirm or deny reports that the Government are considering the removal of winter tug cover from our coastline. He could also explain how they can afford to spend £60 million of taxpayers' money on a royal yacht to safeguard the leadership ambitions of the Secretary of State for Defence, but cannot afford the £3 million a year that it costs to protect Britain's coastline.

We welcome the Bill as far as it goes, but there are many issues that must still be addressed and many questions to which Ministers must find satisfactory answers. We intend to tackle those issues both in Committee and on Report and to ensure that this legislation goes as far as it can to secure Lord Donaldson's ambition of ensuring safer ships and cleaner seas.

6.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John Bowis): To continue where the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) left off, we can join hands across the Chamber in seeking to build on the work of Lord Donaldson. I think she said that she thought this a good Bill. The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said the same, as did all hon. Members who spoke. That was also the view of all parties in the other place. Lord Clinton-Davis wished the Bill well and described it as good. I am happy to accept that accolade as we take it into this House.

Several hon. Members mentioned personal experiences. As the Member of Parliament for the landlocked constituency of Battersea, my memories reflect the Marchioness tragedy, after which I introduced a Bill to improve river safety. Many ideas have been flagged up for the Committee and we shall no doubt enjoy discussing them in detail.

I pay special tribute to the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) who, from the days when he had to cope with the impact of the Sea Empress incident on his constituents, drew a vivid picture of why the Bill is important. His picture was endorsed and reinforced by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux), who described standing beneath the Sea Empress in dry dock and seeing a gaping hole. I must be careful not to prejudge the marine accident investigation branch investigation and inquiry, but the interim recommendation to extend the power to issue a direction to harbour authorities, harbour masters and pilots has been accepted, as has the statutory basis for the national contingency plan. Both are dealt with by the Bill.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley was kind enough to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Ministers. I pass that accolade swiftly to my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping. He and my right hon. Friend are grateful for that tribute. It is in tribute, above all, to the work of Lord Donaldson that we introduce the Bill.

Many of the matters that have been discussed will come up in Committee, for which we have had many volunteers. I shall canter through some of the points. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) asked about pilots. He is right that the captain retains charge of the vessel, even when the pilot may have conduct of it. I hope that that is a helpful clarification.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the Minches. We have undertaken a radar survey of the traffic there. In bad weather there may be circumstances in which it would be better for vessels to use sheltered waters, otherwise vessels should be in the deep water to the west of the Hebrides. He also referred to survival equipment and survival suits. Our tugs carry the equipment necessary for the conditions in which they operate and we encourage fishermen to make similar provision on board their vessels. I can confirm the Scottish legal process in terms of the procurator fiscal and the sheriff courts. I hope that that, too, puts his mind at ease.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate referred to the problem of klondykers. We are aware of it, and I am grateful to them for their support for the relevant measures in the Bill. No doubt we can examine the issue in some detail in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) asked particularly about the Scilly Isles. Lord Donaldson mentioned them, as well as Skomer, as possible marine environmental high risk areas—MEHRAs. We have undertaken radar surveys of both locations, the results of which will be published shortly. They are part of our examination of MEHRAs and I want to reassure my hon. Friend that the Scillies are very much in our mind as we consider that issue.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley referred to the importance of a knowledge of English. It may be of some comfort to him to know that we are about to introduce regulations—the minimum standards of safe communication—on which we have already consulted. They require a person on a United Kingdom ship or any

foreign ship in territorial waters to have on board a person capable of communicating with the shore. That implements in part an EC directive on the training of seamen. The right hon. Gentleman also referred to the reasonable costs of the clean-up following an oil incident. They will be met by the intergovernmental oil pollution liability and compensation system. The costs of planning and preparation will be considered as part of the review of the national contingency plan that my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping has announced, and before any regulations are made under clause 12.

If I may, I shall leave the issue of charging for further discussion in Committee.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) raised a number of points, including some that suggested a degree of gunboat diplomacy in Liberal policy. I must tell him that the United Nations convention on the law of the sea prohibits measures that hamper innocent passage in the territorial sea or other measures on the regulation of maritime traffic that do not conform to international law. We cannot take unilateral action, which he urged, that is mandatory on ships. We can take advisory measures, but mandatory action needs prior approval by the IMO.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Pembroke will understand that I cannot comment on some of his remarks relating to the Sea Empress because they are a matter for the investigation. I have already mentioned the review of the national contingency plan to which he referred. The powers of the Secretary of State to intervene will be discussed in Committee.

The example of the Sea Empress occupies our mind, and the hon. Gentleman referred to compensation claims being dealt with too slowly. We are conscious that we need to look carefully at that matter. At the moment, we have no evidence to suggest that there have been any significant delays in the payments of claims, although that may not be the impression of the person who is waiting. The International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund is required by its establishing convention and rules of procedure to seek documentary evidence of the validity of claims. In some cases, payment can be delayed if that evidence is not provided by the claimant. There is no evidence to suggest that many are suffering financial hardship. There are procedures for claiming hardship payments but, as I understand it, so far, just five people have applied for them.

Various issues were raised about the Marchioness and public inquiries. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State responded to those queries during his speech, but perhaps we will discuss the matter again in Committee. In broad terms, the Secretary of State has discretion to hold public inquiries that are known as formal investigations. We need to judge the circumstances of each incident when deciding how to proceed.

The issue of MEHRAs is a matter of considerable interest to hon. Members on both sides of the House. Some concern was expressed that progress has not been made on them, but I can assure the House that we are currently developing the criteria for environmentally sensitive areas in conjunction with the joint nature conservancy councils, which are the Government's statutory advisers on conservation issues. When the areas are identified, we will look in detail at the shipping patterns in them. I hope that, before too long, we shall be able to consult other interested bodies—certainly later this year.

The European Commission's proposal for marine environmentally sensitive areas—MESAs—was also raised. We need to be clear that we are not duplicating ideas, or proposing conflicting ones. We undertake to consider that matter carefully.

Mr. Dalyell: Does the Minister recall that, in Committee on what became the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, we inserted into the Bill, with the agreement of hon. Members on both sides of the Committee, the concept of marine nature reserves? Progress has been abysmally slow. Eventually, a decision was made on Lundy and Scilly, but little progress has been made on Skomer—my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) will correct me if I am wrong. Nothing has been done about some places in the Outer Hebrides and Loch Sween. Why is it so difficult to make progress?

Mr. Bowis: The best thing would be to discuss that further at a later stage. We are hastening to try to reach agreement with the statutory advisers so that we can bring forward proposals for regulation.

Tugs have been mentioned. It was decided that emergency towing vessels should be stationed on a trial basis at the three locations highlighted by the Donaldson report and the Belton report as having a significantly higher risk factor than other areas—the Dover straits, the Minches and the south-west approaches. The problem of the seasons has been referred to. Weather conditions in the winter can, of course, generally be expected to be the worst. When the trial ends at the end of March, we will consider carefully the long-term future of those vessels.

I hope that I can put the mind of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) at rest when I say that it is the Government's intention to introduce the mandatory aspects of the waste management plans. Following the passage of the Bill we will bring forward regulations for consultation to achieve just that. There may be some confusion, because we are also seeking to lead internationally and to encourage wider agreement within the IMO. The European Commission is also interested in supporting such measures.

Mr. Dalyell: If I have understood it right, it would be churlish not to thank the Minister for doing that. Can we take it that Government amendments will be tabled to introduce mandatory provisions on port waste facilities?

Mr. Bowis: I think that that is not necessary, because the Bill enables regulations to be laid. The intention is to consult following the passage of the Bill on the regulations that would achieve that aim. We can pursue that point further in Committee.

The detection of polluters at sea, which was mentioned by several hon. Members, and the issue of plastics, which was raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, are important matters. The maximum fine was also mentioned: £25,000 in respect of non-oil pollution—chemicals, gases and so on—is, of course, relevant only to magistrates courts. Spillages of that nature, given their rarity, might be referred to the Crown court which has no limitation on the fines it can impose.

Some of the measures in the Bill are sufficiently up to date to be relevant to the most recent spillage, which was of oil. We are taking the lead internationally in developing

[Mr. Bowis]

a workable system of automatic ship identification transponders, which would remove ships' anonymity and allow a polluting ship to be identified even at night or in fog. We have some interesting times ahead in Committee and, for the time being, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

MERCHANT SHIPPING AND MARITIME SECURITY BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill *[Lords]* it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required by the Secretary of State for making any payment in respect of an indemnity given by virtue of the Act to a person taking measures with respect to marine pollution;

(b) any other expenses of a Minister of the Crown attributable to the provisions of the Act; and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums which under any other enactment are payable out of money so provided; and

(2) the making of payments out of money provided by Parliament into the General Lighthouse Fund.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

MERCHANT SHIPPING AND MARITIME SECURITY BILL [*LORDS*] [*WAYS AND MEANS*]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill *[Lords]* it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the imposition in accordance with the International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea 1996 (or any revision of that Convention) of obligations to contribute to the International Hazardous and Noxious Substances Fund established under the Convention;

(2) the imposition of charges for the purposes of recovering costs incurred—

(a) by the Secretary of State, in connection with his maritime functions, or

(b) by general lighthouse authorities, within the meaning of Part VIII of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, in respect of their functions under that Part;

(3) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums which would otherwise be payable into the General Lighthouse Fund; and

(4) the payment of other sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

Welsh Development Agency Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

7.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I wish to set out the purpose of the Bill; to refer to the success of the agency in its use of the existing financial limit; and to set out my priorities for expenditure within the limit proposed by the Bill.

The purpose of the Bill, as set out in clause 1, is to increase the statutory financial limit for the Welsh Development Agency from the present level of £950 million to £1,350 million. The limit was last raised by the Welsh Development Agency Act 1991. On the basis of current estimates, the present limit will be reached during the 1998–99 financial year. It is necessary to raise the limit to permit continued public expenditure to finance the agency's activities so that it can continue its excellent work for the benefit of Wales and the Welsh economy.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery) *rose—*

Mr. Hague: The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) already wishes to intervene, so I shall give way.

Mr. Carlile: Can the Secretary of State confirm that the proposed increase in funding for the Welsh Development Agency does not contain within it a hidden agenda to abolish the Development Board for Rural Wales? Will he confirm that the Development Board for Rural Wales is still considered to be a valuable part of Welsh economic development and that it would be viewed as a serious mistake if anyone were to propose its abolition, either now or in the near future?

Mr. Hague: I can assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that I see a continuing and important role for the Development Board for Rural Wales. He will be reassured that the Bill has nothing to do with that, but I know that Labour Members—who have designs to abolish the Development Board for Rural Wales—will have taken note of his pertinent point.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): It never takes long for the Secretary of State to start discussing Labour policies; it would make a pleasant change if he started defending his own record. As it has been suggested that I have designs to abolish the Development Board for Rural Wales, let me make it clear that I have no such designs.

Mr. Hague: The discussion precipitated by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery has turned out to be most useful because, after all that we have heard about super-quangos and so on, it turns out that it is not Labour's intention to abolish the board after all. No doubt, as the debate continues, we shall be able to enlighten ourselves about many other aspects of Labour policy as well as about the purpose of the Bill, to which subject I return.

Under section 18 of the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975, the financial limit to which I have referred applies to the total cumulative amount of the sums granted

to the agency by the Government. The limit includes: the total of all grant in aid and public dividend capital, less repayments by the agency and excluding administrative expenses; the agency's outstanding borrowings; the third party loans guaranteed by the agency; and any sums issued by the Treasury in consequence of its guaranteeing agency borrowings that have not been repaid to the Treasury.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The Secretary of State is outlining the considerable sums that pass to the agency from the Treasury. Today's *Western Morning News* confirms that several businesses in Cornwall have been approached by organisations using Welsh Development Agency money to encourage them to relocate in Wales. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that it is not Government policy to allow such development agencies to poach—especially from poor areas such as mine—and will he personally seek to ensure that such poaching is not repeated?

Mr. Hague: I can categorically assure the hon. Gentleman that it is not Government policy to poach companies from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and that it is not the policy of the Welsh Development Agency to do that. I would deprecate very strongly poaching from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. However, companies that are already located somewhere in the United Kingdom sometimes propose an expansion project or have definitely decided to leave their particular location, and that is a different matter. I know that that is not what the hon. Gentleman means by poaching; what I understand him to mean by that is certainly not the policy of the Government, or of the Welsh Development Agency or of the Development Board for Rural Wales.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater) *rose—*

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives) *rose—*

Mr. Hague: The west country Members are most welcome at this debate on Welsh matters. I give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King).

Mr. King: I do not wish further to disrupt my right hon. Friend's speech, but I should like to welcome what he has just said because a firm in my constituency relocated to Wales with the benefit of substantial grants. We recognise the excellent work being done by the Welsh Development Agency and the serious problem of unemployment in Wales, with which the Government's policy has helped so significantly. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance, however, that he will be vigilant in ensuring that firms that have not considered going to Wales are not attracted to do so when they might otherwise continue and expand in parts of the country that contribute through their taxes to the benefits that the Welsh Development Agency is able to offer, but which, despite having their own unemployment problems, do not have any particular inducements to offer?

Mr. Hague: Of course, we want to attract as much new investment to Wales as we possibly can, but that must not be done through poaching or in a way that destroys jobs in other parts of the United Kingdom. That, of course, would not be a proper use of taxpayers' money. I am satisfied that the Welsh Development Agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales pursue that policy as rigorously as I would intend them to, which is very rigorously. Sometimes, one or two advertisements or statements have been misinterpreted, but I will certainly give the matter every consideration and be as firm in the future as I have been in the past to make sure that we are not poaching from or destroying jobs elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Harris: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the job losses that Cornwall has encountered in the past few weeks. Does he appreciate the anger that is felt in Cornwall when it suffers job losses, and an apparently well-documented example is given in today's *Western Morning News* of attempts to poach jobs and firms from Cornwall to Wales, and to south Wales in particular? Will he do what the Minister with responsibility for the south-west, our right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), has promised to do, which is to look into specific examples? If he finds that there have been attempts to poach, will he put an immediate end to the practice?

Mr. Hague: I am interested to hear what my hon. Friend says. If there are well-documented examples—*[Interruption.]* Of course it remains to be seen. I have recently read many things in newspapers that I would not describe as well documented, but if there are well-documented examples, I shall consider them.

There should not be poaching from other parts of the United Kingdom, but I say without apology that where there are new investment projects that could go to anywhere in the United Kingdom, the Welsh Development Agency and the Welsh Office will fight very hard for them to come to Wales.

Some situations are open to misinterpretation. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—I apologise for mentioning him in his absence, but I had not foreseen this point arising—criticised the agency for securing for Wales several hundred jobs in a company that was previously located in Hull. In fact, the company was closing in Hull anyway and was deciding whether to go to northern France or to Wales. The agency was right to fight for those jobs, but that is different from the poaching to which the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) referred.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I am sure that the Secretary of State will recall that what the deputy leader of the Labour party actually said was that the incident constituted one of the best arguments that he had ever heard for the English regions, including Yorkshire and Humberside, having regional development agencies of their own.

Mr. Hague: We continue to receive clarification of Labour party policy. I believe that the English regional assemblies would be a different matter. I doubt that the company in question, or companies in general, would be more inclined to locate in Hull because there was a regional assembly, just as I have grave doubts that any company would be more inclined to locate in Wales because there was a Welsh Assembly.

[Mr. Hague]

The Bill provides that future increases of the financial limit shall be made by secondary legislation, using the affirmative resolution procedure. The advantages are clear. It will reduce the burden on future legislative programmes while retaining proper accountability to the House and an opportunity to debate the issue.

The new limit should be sufficient for several years. The increase of the limit carries no implications for spending or policy decisions in future years. Such decisions will be made in the usual way, as part of public expenditure surveys. The revised financial limit will, however, provide the flexibility needed to ensure that the agency is properly resourced to undertake its existing programme of work and to take advantage of new opportunities that may arise.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): The Secretary of State must know that there can be very few people in Wales who have not congratulated the WDA on its magnificent work in bringing investment into the country, but he must also be aware that many people, especially in my constituency, are deeply worried that some of the WDA's roles, such as land reclamation and urban renewal, have been completely ignored to enable it to make those magnificent achievements and attract inward investment from abroad. What will he do about tip reclamation schemes in places where we need the land very badly for indigenous industry, such as at Coedely and Cilfynydd, or for urban development, such as in Pontypridd?

Mr. Hague: Those urban programmes are not ignored. They remain important programmes and important objectives of the agency. Inward investment has been the agency's highest priority in recent times because there has been an unusual degree of opportunity to attract inward investment—I make no apology for that—but those other programmes are not ignored, and I shall mention them later if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

In November 1996, I announced a significant increase in the agency's base programme for the current financial year, from £120 million to £157 million. That included an increase of more than 60 per cent. in central Government provision to the agency to enable it to meet its commitments to the LG project and to fund other new inward investment projects throughout Wales.

The agency's budget for the coming year, which I announced in December, will similarly allow it to build on its existing successes and to increase its spending on strategic sites throughout Wales, to which I attach great importance. Central Government provision for the agency for next year will be £84.7 million and grant in aid is 8 per cent. above the equivalent figure for 10 years earlier in real terms. That will enable the agency to fund a base programme of £150 million in the forthcoming year.

The agency has a central role in the economic development of Wales. I should refer briefly to the functions and objectives of the agency as set out in the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975. The agency exists

"to further the economic development of Wales or any part of Wales; to promote industrial efficiency and international competitiveness"

and

"to further the improvement of the environment in Wales".

There can be no disputing the excellent results that the WDA has achieved. It has played a significant part in transforming the Welsh economy in line with the Government's priorities. As a result, we have today a more diverse and well-balanced industrial structure. Our manufacturing base, at 28 per cent. of gross domestic product, is one of the most dynamic in the United Kingdom. We have attracted new high-technology industries. Manufacturing output in Wales in the past two years has grown by well over 10 per cent. Production businesses have multiplied by about 46 per cent. since 1979 and indigenous companies—of which I shall say more in a moment—are taking full advantage of the tremendous sourcing opportunity provided by inward investors.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am sure that the Secretary of State will say something later about spreading prosperity throughout Wales, but I remind him of figures released by Plaid Cymru last year which show that 80 per cent. of the jobs created by the agency have occurred and, indeed, are predicted to occur within about 10 per cent. of the Welsh land area, and that 60 per cent. of Welsh unemployed people live outside the region specified for anticipated success. Does not that require pretty fundamental reconsideration of the WDA's strategy and is such reconsideration now afoot?

Mr. Hague: I shall come to that point. Indeed, I intend to announce a policy change on that matter, which I believe the hon. Gentleman will be able to welcome.

I was describing the agency's achievements. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives and the hon. Member for Truro will be pleased to note that since taking responsibility for inward investment in 1983, the agency has recorded an enormous number of inward investment projects—about 855—from overseas. Such projects have promised the creation or safeguarding of more than 100,000 jobs, and in the past calendar year alone, the agency has played its part in attracting £2.3 billion of investment and 15,000 jobs through 150 projects new to Wales—a record-breaking achievement. We have made an excellent start to 1997 and more good news is in the pipeline.

The consequence of those achievements is that unemployment has been reduced to 93,000. For the past six months, it has been falling by 18,000 a month. The news on long-term unemployment is also good. With the jobs come the wages that bolster local economies.

Securing the LG project is a tremendous achievement in terms of employment and investment, as has been acknowledged by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is the most significant project that Wales has ever seen and the largest inward investment project in Europe. It will bring with it about 6,100 direct jobs and thousands of indirect jobs, and it can benefit the whole of Wales. I congratulate all involved on that magnificent achievement.

The benefits of LG should not be confined to south-east Wales, and we are all working to ensure that they are spread throughout Wales. Immediately after the announcement, we moved quickly to set up a group comprising the many parts of the Welsh Office with an interest, the WDA, the training and enterprise councils,

the Employment Service and many local authorities, to ensure that Wales as a whole benefits from the LG investment.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): How does the Secretary of State, alongside the Welsh Development Agency, intend to tackle large-scale youth unemployment and long-term unemployment in constituencies such as mine? Is there a joint plan to tackle those problems in the constituency of Alyn and Deeside?

Mr. Hague: Yes, the plan is to continue the success in reducing unemployment—including in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—that we have achieved in recent months. We started this year with the announcement that British Aerospace in his constituency is to create another 100 jobs. That was good news for his constituency, and I hope that it will receive more good news in the future. Long-term and youth unemployment is falling, as is unemployment as a whole.

On the LG project, wider issues are being considered, such as training skills, transport and component suppliers. Companies anywhere in Wales can do business with LG if they are able to meet the company's requirements. More and more companies are reinvesting in Wales, which shows their satisfaction with the Welsh work force and the confidence that they have in the strengths of the Welsh economy, and reinforces the successful image of Wales for prospective investors.

A number of very good announcements have recently been made: Sony is one and Bertrand Faure at Tredegar is another. However, it is essential that the role of indigenous companies is recognised in the same way as that of inward investors. Between January 1994 and December 1996, 141 foreign and 567 UK-owned companies received regional selective assistance payments towards projects in Wales. In the 10-year period to March 1996, almost 1,500 offers of regional selective assistance were accepted by UK-owned companies for projects in Wales, whereas fewer than 300 offers were accepted by foreign-owned businesses. During the same period, RSA totalling almost £215 million was paid to UK-owned companies, and nearly £213 million to foreign-owned concerns. It is clear that home-grown companies have received far more assistance than is commonly supposed.

Encouraging indigenous small firms to supply inward investors is part of the range of services that is now marketed under the Business Connect banner. In this financial year, Source Wales has helped 537 Welsh companies, and 112 deals have been won for those companies. The Source Wales database of 2,000 Welsh small and medium-sized enterprises assists in identifying supply opportunities to major manufacturing companies, not only in Wales but throughout the United Kingdom and Europe. The recent announcement about Halla's sourcing in north Wales—£1 million-worth of business—is a prime example of the benefits that the Source Wales programme brings to indigenous companies, and shows that major investments can benefit the whole of Wales rather than just the immediate vicinity.

Mr. Dafis: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I may give way again later in my speech, but in fairness to other hon. Members I should proceed.

Other agency initiatives to encourage indigenous firms include technology development and transfer. Under the regional technology action plan, the WDA is working with a large number of organisations to strengthen the Welsh innovation culture and to develop further the technological infrastructure in Wales, including Wales-wide telecoms cabling. Through the technology transfer initiative, more than 400 Welsh companies have been audited to establish the adequacy of their approach to innovation and technology. If the audits identify opportunities to improve competitiveness, European grants are available through the WDA to introduce technological solutions. In that way, companies throughout Wales have ready access to the best available expertise.

On finance for growth generally, the agency has moved from being a major investor in its own right to working in conjunction with the private sector to improve the availability of venture capital. In particular, it is now seeking to establish a network of "business angels", and has recently expanded its Eurolink scheme to operate worldwide, called Globalink, to establish for Welsh companies strong collaborative links with overseas business partners.

Thanks to those and other initiatives, and to the exceptionally favourable circumstances of the United Kingdom economy, business optimism remains positive in Wales, which shows that the Welsh economy is on a sound footing and that we can all have confidence in the future. Some recent surveys have shown Welsh business optimism to be the best in the United Kingdom.

Since 1979, the WDA has spent more than £820 million on property development, which has provided more that 20 million sq ft of floorspace. It has developed a network of new business parks across north and south and south-west Wales, taking full advantage of the A55 and M4 corridors, and has also pushed development into less accessible areas, a fine example of which is the Cleddau Bridge business park at Pembroke dock. A business park is also to be developed at Parc Pensarn, Carmarthen. The agency has placed ever-increasing emphasis on joint development projects with private sector partners.

After strong growth in auto-components jobs last year, the WDA has announced today that it will press ahead with a new business park in the Neath valley, which is designed specifically for automotive suppliers. It has awarded a £440,000 contract to install road and other services at the Neath Vale supplier park, which should be ready by May. Interest from potential tenants is high and the agency is talking to at least six companies, which together could bring 300 jobs to the area.

The agency's achievements do not end with job creation: that is the point made by the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells). It has also provided a better environment in which Welsh people can live and work. The agency's land reclamation programme has been huge. Since 1979, it has reclaimed 6,500 hectares of derelict land at more than 920 locations. Despite the pressures on spending and the priority rightly given to inward investment, the agency currently has almost 3,500 acres in the process of being reclaimed and, on current plans, some 1,850 acres will be completed in the next two years. That remains a massive programme by any standards, even though we must give higher priority to other areas.

[Mr. Hague]

In rural areas, under the agency's rural prosperity programme, £2.6 million has been invested in 248 projects selected by individual communities.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I shall give way, but then I really must get on.

Mr. Rowlands: Does the acreage of land reclamation to which the right hon. Gentleman referred include the sites that are currently on hold as a result of the halt in budget development for the land reclamation programme?

Mr. Hague: The 3,500 acres include all projects, some of which are waiting for further attention, but the 1,850 acres to be completed in the next two years relate to projects that are either proceeding now or are certain to proceed in that period.

The rural programme to which I referred is part of the agency's wider development programme in rural areas which, in the period from 1991 to 1996, totalled some £34 million. Although £5.5 million of funding for small rural schemes will be transferred from the WDA to rural local authorities on 1 April this year, the agency will continue to play a significant role in rural areas. Indeed, £650,000 of rural funding will be retained by the agency to continue to fund LEADER and Interreg groups in the coming year, and a further £750,000 will be used to fulfil its commitment to the Welsh national botanical garden at Middleton. The agency is currently developing a strategy for rural economic development based on a package of services and capital projects, in conjunction with local authorities.

Despite those numerous successes, we know that there is more to do. We will continue to help to create jobs across a broad range of businesses. In addition to manufacturing, which remains a cornerstone of our economy, we want to see stronger services, with even more financial services and research and technology-based businesses in Wales—all of which, of course, offer above-average wages. In all those areas, the WDA will continue to play an active role.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I must get on because I have given way a lot. If I have a little time in the next few minutes, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I must proceed with my speech.

We need to ensure that industry and commerce have the right supply of qualified, well-motivated people. That is why I have published the updates to two important Government programmes: "People and Prosperity: Building on Success", which I launched today and which concerns our agenda for action on training; and the initiative, "Bright Future: Beating our Previous Best", which I launched last week.

I have set the agency challenging targets to ensure that it directs its efforts towards what I believe to be the priorities for Wales. The agency has performed well against its targets—we have not yet reached the end of the current financial year, yet a number of them have been exceeded. For the current year, I set a target of £650 million of private sector investment to be levered in. So far, the agency has reached £1,986 million. My target of 12,500 jobs to be created or safeguarded has been exceeded, with 13,860 jobs to date.

Wales and the WDA can be justifiably proud of that record and I want the WDA to continue doing what it does best—helping to create new jobs for all parts of Wales. I want more investment and more jobs in those parts of Wales that are still affected by the highest unemployment: parts of the west, north-west and valleys.

We are already doing a great deal to spread the benefits of the investment that has already been made: the Source Wales programme; encouragement to suppliers across Wales to link up with inward investors; ensuring that inward investors look at sites across Wales before they invest; and setting targets for the numbers of jobs outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors.

The WDA has so far this financial year exceeded its target of 20 per cent. outside those eastern corridors by creating more than 32 per cent. of its jobs outside those areas. I have decided that it is now time to take further steps to ensure that areas that have so far not been the principal beneficiaries of inward investment can share in the growing success of Wales.

First, I will set new and more demanding targets for inward investment outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors. Although the precise level of those targets remains for discussion, they will be significantly more demanding than the current target.

Secondly, I am asking the WDA, within agreed UK and European limits, to recognise the extra costs of locating in some areas by giving more assistance to companies locating in those areas than to equivalent projects elsewhere. Ultimately, of course, the choice of a location is for the company but, we should make no mistake—it is no accident that companies are coming to Wales. I intend to ensure that companies keep coming and that they come to all parts of Wales. The two initiatives will form part of the policy guidance and direction that I intend to give the agency in the future.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East) *rose*—

Mr. Ainger *rose*—

Mr. Hague: I am spoilt for choice; two hon. Members want to intervene.

Mr. Anderson: The initiatives are certainly welcome. The Secretary of State's guidance is for the future and critics will say that it is guidance in the very dying days of this Parliament. Even in December, the agency killed a £3 million project for a science and technology centre at Penllergaer, near Swansea. People will ask why. The guidance is welcome, but why is it so belated? The facts have been apparent for years.

Mr. Hague: There is no need to apologise for the way in which the agency has approached such matters in recent years. It has been extremely important to bring large investments into any part of Wales for which they can be secured. Of course, the company plays a large role in choosing the location.

Now that we have had spectacular success in some areas, it is right to say that we would be prepared to pay more for any given project to go to a new area than to go to an area where a large project had already been established. It would have been wrong to say that in the past, but now it is fair. We should concentrate resources to a somewhat greater extent on areas that have not been the principal beneficiaries of large-scale inward investment.

Mr. Ainger: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: This will have to be the last time that I give way.

Mr. Ainger: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. May I, with my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), say that the investment is belated but welcome? The Welsh Office has been advised by the WDA that in areas of high unemployment—especially those in my constituency, in south-west Wales and in north-west Wales, such as the Holyhead travel-to-work area—enterprise zones should be re-established as a key marketing ploy. Can the Secretary of State explain why that recommendation has been rejected by the Welsh Office?

Mr. Hague: We have been over that ground before. The hon. Gentleman knows that the Government's view is that enterprise zones are of assistance mainly where there has been a failure in the private sector property market. They can help in some cases, but not in others. We had little or no evidence that enterprise zones would be of direct help in those cases. As he knows, a great deal of other assistance is available to his constituency and to other parts of west Wales. Greater assistance may be available after what I have said this evening.

The priorities for the future of the agency are clear. I expect it to focus particularly on inward investment and indigenous business growth. Safeguarding and creating jobs in Wales is paramount, although the agency has other responsibilities as well. I shall continue to press on the WDA the points to which I referred this evening, when we meet later this month.

I know that Opposition Members have criticised the budget for the coming year, although at £150 million of gross expenditure and £85 million of Government grant, it is a very large programme. In recent weeks, Opposition Front Benchers have committed themselves to the existing spending ceilings of the Welsh Office for the next two years, while also increasing local government spending and setting up an assembly. Against such a background, they would have little hope of providing the level of resources that I am providing, let alone increasing it. If they can work out how they would provide such an increase, we would be interested to hear about it tonight.

We can all agree on the need to make the most of the agency's success. The chairman, David Rowe-Beddoe, and his team have worked hard to ensure that the agency adheres to the principles of compliance, openness and financial regularity that we expect from public bodies in Wales. They have worked hard at presenting the agency and a successful Wales to the world. The agency deserves the support of all of us in that. It is concentrating on what it excels at—winning jobs and investment for Wales.

I want the agency to build on those foundations and to achieve even greater success. With this Government, it has a secure future in further developing the increasing prosperity of Wales.

7.36 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I begin on a note of agreement and join the Secretary of State in expressing my congratulations to the chairman, the board and all the staff of the Welsh Development Agency on having served the agency and the people of Wales well over the years. I especially congratulate the chairman, who had a difficult inheritance. Perhaps I shall return to that.

Although the Bill is specific, the debate has been wide ranging. The Secretary of State reviewed events over the past 20 years. I shall touch on some of those, as history can be interpreted in more than one way.

A number of initiatives were announced by the Secretary of State this evening. I broadly welcome them, as far as I understand them. I shall examine them in detail and apply the critical test by asking what resources will be available to ensure that those initiatives are carried through.

I was particularly interested in the Secretary of State's statement about ensuring that future developments take place outwith the hot area along the M4 corridor between Newport and Bridgend.

At present there is little evidence that the WDA or the Welsh Office has succeeded in getting investment out of that area, or that either of them understands the problems that are already developing, especially in the Newport area, as a result of the skills shortages stemming largely from the failure of the Welsh Office to offer a co-ordinated programme to provide skills or to provide adequate resources for the training and enterprise councils.

The Bill is a technical measure and is largely non-controversial. I put on record my broad support for it. We will assist its passage through the various parliamentary procedures.

There are two elements to the Bill: first, the increase in the statutory financial limit, which we would obviously support. The Government presumably regard it as particularly important in the light of the spending commitments that they have entered into in respect of the LG development at Newport.

Secondly, the Bill provides for future increases in the statutory financial limit to be made by means of secondary legislation—an interesting and novel proposition. It fits very well with our proposals for the introduction of a Welsh Assembly—secondary legislation could then be dealt with by that assembly. I know that there is an argument against using secondary legislation to introduce the increases—it is claimed that those increases should be subject to debate and scrutiny in Parliament. But the Welsh Assembly will provide the ideal opportunity for proper public debate.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman and I shall tell him why. He has been a Member of the House since 1992—almost five years—

[Mr. Davies]

including a brief and relatively undistinguished career on the Government Front Bench. In that five years he has shown no understanding of the normal courtesies of Parliament. Until he does, I have no intention of giving way to him on this or any other occasion.

The debate about the provision of secondary legislation is interesting and it may well be pursued in Committee. It is an interesting comment on the legislative arrangements in the House that, when dealing with a Bill such as this—involving a minor technical matter on which there is broad agreement—the Government have to suspend the Standing Orders of the House, as they did last Friday, to take away from the majority of Welsh Members of Parliament their existing rights, under Standing Order No. 86, to sit on the Committee that will deal with the legislation.

Last year was the 20th birthday of the Welsh Development Agency and I took the opportunity over the weekend to read with interest the debate that took place on the Second Reading of the Welsh Development Agency Bill. The debate was initiated by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), who has taken a great interest in the proceedings and developments of the agency ever since. During the Second Reading debate, the WDA was vigorously opposed by the then Conservative Front-Bench team. The then hon. Member for Pembroke, Mr. Edwards, addressing my right hon. and learned Friend, said:

"He seeks to interfere where he should leave alone. He seeks to dictate where he should give freedom . . . He persists with policies that will destroy confidence."

He then asked the House to reject the Bill establishing the Welsh Development Agency.

It is interesting that the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) is in his place. At the time—and I believe subsequently—he was one of the strongest opponents of the WDA. He said:

"For the Government to become involved themselves in industry is an admission of failure. We may be sure that where private industry cannot succeed the Government will almost certainly fail."—[*Official Report*, 26 June 1975; Vol. 894, c. 712, 790.]

He and all other Conservative Members of Parliament voted against the creation of the WDA.

Since then, and especially since 1979, the Conservative party and successive Conservative Secretaries of State have been consistent about only two matters. I hope that the present Secretary of State, who has a few weeks left in the job, will pay attention to these important matters. I understand that he was a 16-year-old at the time, causing great embarrassment to himself and the Conservative party with a speech in which he called on the Conservatives to roll back the frontiers of the state. Perhaps these are the frontiers of the state that he wanted to roll back.

Successive Conservative Secretaries of State have been consistent about only two things. First, they have never reconciled themselves to the agency or to the concept of partnership. Secondly, they have been consistent in their determination to use the agency's successes for their own party political purposes.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): The hon. Gentleman has forgotten to mention that when my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Crickhowell and I came into office, we decided to retain the agency and placed it on a new and reformed basis so that it has succeeded in avoiding many of the pitfalls that we envisaged for it at the time.

Mr. Davies: There has been no change in the agency's statutory basis. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has used that argument before, but there has been no change in the agency's statutory basis, and he and his colleagues opposed its creation. The right hon. Gentleman has loyally served several Secretaries of State who have done their very best since 1979 to undermine not only the integrity, but the existence of the WDA.

I remind the present Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State of the regime that existed under Dr. Gwyn Jones, the former disgraced chairman of the agency and a pal of Lord Walker. I shall remind the Secretary of State of what the Public Accounts Committee said of the regime under the then Secretary of State and Dr. Gwyn Jones. It said in paragraph 3.(xviii) of its 47th report on the WDA's accounts for 1991–92 that it was

"unacceptable that the Welsh Office took no action against anyone in the top echelons of the Agency who presided over a catalogue of serious and inexcusable breaches of expected standards of control and accountability."

The Secretary of State's predecessor, the free market anti-Welsh Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), cut the WDA's budget—its grant in aid—by two thirds. He enforced on the WDA a policy of property sales that wreaked havoc in 1995–96. The agency's ability to prepare on the basis of stability and sustainability has still not been restored. Peter Walker, now Lord Walker, attempted covert privatisation with Operation Wizard. The right hon. Member for Wokingham was less subtle; he preferred to emasculate the agency by imposing ferocious cuts in its budget.

I want to press three charges against the present Secretary of State. First, he has ruthlessly suppressed the findings enclosed in the WDA's corporate plan submitted to the Welsh Office in August. That plan for the forthcoming financial year reveals a number of interesting figures about the state of the Welsh economy.

First, the plan reveals that Welsh gross domestic product is 16 per cent. below the UK average. It reveals that Welsh household income is 77 per cent. of the UK average. It reveals that between 1990–95, real GDP in Wales rose by 3.3 per cent., whereas real GDP in the UK as a whole rose by 5.4 per cent. It reveals that real services GDP in Wales rose by 5.6 per cent., whereas in the UK as a whole it rose by 8.5 per cent. No amount of propaganda can disguise the true impact of those figures on our Welsh communities. We have now had 18 years of Conservative government and the relative position of the Welsh economy is no better than it was in 1979 when the Conservatives took office. Today we have 200,000 fewer people in work than when the present Prime Minister took office in 1990.

Secondly, the present Secretary of State has denied the WDA the funds required for long-term stability even though he claims that it is his protected and favoured expenditure programme. To do what little he has, he has—as he announced to me last Monday in a parliamentary answer—cut the budgets of the agriculture, training, roads, housing, environmental services and

education programmes. Those cuts have been imposed to pay for the small increase in his economic development programme.

In the current financial year—in November 1996—to avert the crisis of his own making, the Secretary of State had to inject an emergency package of £25 million into the agency. Even with that experience of the damage caused by underfunding, the base programme for the next financial year, at £150 million, will be a lot less than required.

The agency itself—on page 17 of its corporate plan, which it submitted on 26 July 1996 to the Welsh Office—called for base expenditure of £178 million, plus European funding. I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) are particularly concerned about cuts in the land reclamation programme. The information that I am about to provide will very clearly explain to them why those cuts are about to be implemented.

Mr. Hague: Would the hon. Gentleman increase the agency's programme for the coming year?

Mr. Davies: Let us deal with the current budget. As soon as the Secretary of State and the Government can pluck up the courage to face the electorate, we will have an election. As soon as we have a new Government, that Government will set about delivering their own programmes. I am now telling the Secretary of State of the consequences of the guidance that he gave to the Welsh Development Agency and of the—I believe dishonest—failure on his part to provide it with funds to perform those actions that he has publicly required it to do.

On page 17 of the corporate plan, which was submitted to the Secretary of State last July, the agency called for £178 million base expenditure, plus European funding. It stated:

"This would enable the Agency to achieve its objectives and the targets set out in the strategic guidance letter"—

which is the public guidance that the Secretary of State provides to the agency for the forthcoming year. The agency told the Secretary of State that that amount would be required to meet his own, publicly stated guidance.

The report went on to state:

"Whilst funding at this level would not be sufficient for the agency to secure the very large inward investment projects, this would enable it to deliver a range of programmes consistent with its short, medium and long-term strategies for development and job creation in Wales.

Activity would be centred on converting existing projects, providing the base for future investment, re-establishing the land reclamation programme towards previous millennium targets and maintaining the infrastructure projects at broadly current levels."

Therefore, to stand still, next year the agency will require £180 million-plus, whereas its budget is £150 million, which is £30 million less than it told the Secretary of State it requires to meet his targets. Of that £150 million, some £25 million is already earmarked for the LG development at Newport. The reality is that there will be savage cuts in the agency's programme, and the effective end of any more major inward investment projects. Quite simply, the agency does not have the money to perform those tasks that, 10 or 15 minutes ago, the Secretary of State told the House that it intended to perform.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Does not that put in context the two new pledges made by the Secretary of State on increasing investment in west Wales? If the resources are not there, they will not happen.

Mr. Davies: That is exactly the case. It is also true that the Secretary of State said in this debate, in reply to an intervention, that, in the next two years, there would be a guaranteed land reclamation programme. To my knowledge, no such announcement has been made by the Welsh Development Agency, and no financial provision is being made to allow such land reclamation work to proceed. I look forward with great interest to hearing some clarification on those matters, perhaps in the Minister's reply to this debate. If he cannot clarify the matter today, perhaps the Secretary of State will write to me and tell me when those decisions were taken, when they will be made public, what financial provision is being made and when he intends to tell local authorities about the decisions that he has apparently made.

Dr. Howells: Does my hon. Friend agree that it was very unsatisfactory that the Secretary of State refused to name the big schemes included in those 3,000-odd acres, and that some reclamation schemes are a good deal less expensive to implement than others? If one has to detoxify land and cart away thousands of tonnes of toxic material from sites, it will bite into any agency's budget. To learn now that those projects are in doubt for the immediate future will do nothing for the confidence of the communities that will have to put up with that stuff for generations.

Mr. Davies: I know very well the site referred to by my hon. Friend, and the site at Treharris, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. From my own experience—if I may be a constituency Member of Parliament for a moment—I am also very familiar with the situation at Bargoed, which provides the clearest testament of the WDA's failure to possess a sustainable budget. Work finished two years ago at the Bargoed colliery tip. Half the tip was removed, but the other half is still in place, dominating the entire central part of the Rhymney valley. All my hon. Friends who represent former mining constituencies are well aware of the inadequacies of this budget and of the WDA's inability to sustain a land reclamation programme.

The third charge I make against the Secretary of State is that, whereas he has been more than anxious to try to take party political credit for the WDA's endeavours—especially for the LG investment—he has been singularly uninterested in developing an analysis of the various needs of Wales's economic regions, and especially of the hard-pressed west. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) was very anxious to speak in this debate, but he has had to leave the Chamber because representatives from his constituency are visiting.

The Secretary of State has also not shown any interest in the case for developing our indigenous industries. Barry Hartop was a very successful chief executive, and he played a crucial role in attracting LG to Newport. He could have played an equally important role in ensuring

[Mr. Davies]

maximum spin-off benefit from that investment. I would have been the first to congratulate him and to wish him well had he found other opportunities to use his skills. However, I think that the Secretary of State's connivance—a word which I use advisedly—in releasing Mr. Hartop on a "sale-or-return" basis to the Conservative party's pet project, the Greenwich millennium dome, was not only insulting to Wales but, by leaving the agency without a chief executive at this crucial time, likely to prejudice the chances of our getting maximum benefit from LG.

The coming general election will be important for the Welsh Development Agency, and I have been open about our intentions for the agency. I want it to operate within a new democratic framework, and to retain its operational independence. I believe that it can continue to play a crucial role, and I want to see its funding put on a more secure and sustainable basis. I also want it to develop a closer working relationship with the other development agencies, and specifically with providers of education and training.

The conflicting pressures within the Conservative party are now clear for all to see. We had a graphic demonstration of those pressures at the start of this debate. Conservative Members cannot agree on their own devolution policy, and they cannot agree on their policies for regional economic development. For us, the Welsh Development Agency is an essential instrument for economic development. For the Conservatives, it is increasingly becoming an unwanted, unacceptable and expensive mechanism which interferes in the operation of the free market. Many in the Cabinet—such as the current Chief Secretary to the Treasury—would be happy to see the end of the agency and the Welsh Office's ability to make independent bids for inward investment.

I should be happy for the Bill to secure a speedy passage through Parliament. I would be happier still, and I believe that the nation would also be happier, if the Government were to have a speedy passage from office. They show no real understanding of the problems of Wales; therefore, they have no long-term strategy to deal with them.

7.58 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I must begin by nailing the travesty of the truth perpetrated by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies). As I remember his speech, he said that, over the past 18 years, the Government appear to have attempted to undermine the efforts of the Welsh Development Agency. That bit of rewriting history really does equate with some of the worst rewrites in the history of modern Europe.

We all know that the WDA is and has been one of the most important engines in the transformation of the Welsh economy that we have seen over the past 18 years. Its achievements have been astonishing, and astonishingly good for Wales; and we should not forget them. As the hon. Member for Caerphilly implied, they were summed up in the concise document published last year on the occasion of the WDA's 20th anniversary. The document was entitled "Twenty Reasons To Celebrate", and I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has updated those achievements today.

The agency has helped to bring hundreds of new international companies and tens of thousands of new manufacturing jobs to Wales, and it is still doing so—one need look only at the enormous current investment in Newport by the Korean company LG, and the 6,100 jobs in the pipeline. I am sure that, even as I speak, the agency is in touch with other potential investors in Wales from all over the world. I am sure that we all hope that its efforts will continue, and will result in further successes.

Compared with the billions of pounds of investment secured for Wales—I believe that it had reached £6.7 billion last year; that is only since 1983, and my right hon. Friend has updated that figure by a couple of billion pounds yet again today—the WDA's total funding, even with the enhanced limit set out in the Bill, almost pales into insignificance.

Inward investment, however, is only one aspect of the WDA's activities. It has literally prepared the ground and provided well-infrastructured land and buildings, not only for inward investors but for developing local businesses, and it has sought to improve and assist them by a variety of means, including the Source Wales programme, Eurolink and now Globalink. The Source Wales programme has helped to secure international orders for some 500 Welsh businesses.

The agency's flexibility, entrepreneurial thrust and expertise has, on the whole, been a great asset in many areas, and has helped to loosen some long-standing logjams in development, sometimes not without risk to its own reputation.

The agency's work in land reclamation has already been mentioned. I regard it as a triumph of persistence, and the face of Wales looks much better as a consequence. Last year, when the agency celebrated its 20th anniversary, 15,000 acres—the equivalent of 4,000 rugby pitches—had been reclaimed, providing land for 180 industrial sites and factory premises employing 25,000 people, as well as land for homes, hospitals, schools and parks.

There is hardly a significant town in Wales that does not have a WDA presence. I regard urban regeneration as an extension of the land reclamation policy. Some 40 towns in Wales are earmarked for economic and environmental renewal, with some £120 million of agency money generating about £200 million of private investment.

I have only touched on some of the agency's considerable achievements of the past few years, but I think I have said enough to justify my belief that the agency has given extremely good value for money to Wales and the British taxpayer—long may it continue to do so.

I am sure it is only through the agency and the allied efforts that we are going to get good-quality jobs, raise average incomes in Wales and bring work to our westernmost areas and outside the M4 and A55 corridors, where the unemployment percentages are very high in some places, although the actual numbers involved are small compared with the industrialised areas of east Wales. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced his new policy guidelines to be given to the agency, to extend its efforts in the most rural western areas.

The Government's financial strategy of requiring the agency to generate a substantial proportion of its base programme costs is, I agree, challenging, but it is surely

right—we do not want the agency sitting back and playing landlord on an ever-increasing industrial property estate. That would be bad for the agency, and might skew, if not emasculate, its entrepreneurial thrust. Enabling investors to purchase gives them a bigger stake in their success on site, wherever they have settled, and spreads any risk to the taxpayer's investment.

The European connection is also looming large in importance. The WDA acted as a focus for Welsh representation in Brussels, and has extended its office there from the public to the private sector. Wales is one of the first regions to have received European Commission funding for a regional technology plan, designed to promote investment in innovation and technology. That is a very important step forward, full of promise for the development of the Welsh economy.

I pay tribute to the agency for its active support of the Welsh link with the four motor regions—the most advanced regions in Europe—which enabled many companies in Wales to develop links with those markets, something that they would not otherwise have been able to do.

Not unexpectedly, the agency's life has not been without its troubles. It is a measure of the stature of the present chairman, David Rowe-Beddoe, that he has been able not only to deal with the mistakes of the past but to keep the agency's eyes fixed on achieving its targets for the present and the future.

I was very glad to hear the hon. Member for Caerphilly pay tribute to the chairman and his team, as he does deserve our thanks for restoring the agency's good name and reputation. He certainly has my admiration, and I have no doubt that he is probably the best chairman the agency has ever had. Praise in the Chamber for anyone outside is such a rare delicacy that I should perhaps say immediately that I have no interest to declare, and that my paean is beyond suspicion.

What is to be the future of the agency which the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), whom I am glad to see in his place, had the foresight to establish, and which we had the wisdom to reform and retain on a new basis, in spite of our earlier critical opposition? Perhaps none of us at that time foresaw just how much we would need the agency and how much success it would achieve for Wales—140,000 jobs created or safeguarded since 1983 alone, which is certainly no mean achievement.

It has never been clear what future the Opposition have in mind for the agency, other than that it would be responsible to the proposed assembly. I hope that that does not lead to internal meddling and parochialism, but I have to say that I suspect the worst.

I read the article in *The Western Mail* this morning by the hon. Member for Caerphilly, and was more confused than enlightened by it. My impression was that other hands were involved in the writing of it, but I do not know whether I am right. The hon. Gentleman was happy to acknowledge Labour's parentage of the Welsh Development Agency, but he was also prepared to damn with faint praise its other offspring—the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales. He almost implied that they were surplus to requirements. He said:

"It is wasteful and bureaucratic to have the WDA, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Welsh Office Industry Department, the Land Authority for Wales and Local Enterprise Agencies. I believe these bodies should be streamlined to achieve substantial cost savings".

Mr. Ron Davies *indicated assent.*

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is nodding. We normally understand the word "streamlining" in that context as meaning being steamrollered. I suspect that that is what the hon. Gentleman has in mind. If the Development Board for Rural Wales is included in that threat of streamlining, I am sure that his ideas will go down like a lead balloon in mid-Wales. Putting the land authority under threat will fall like a ton of bricks on the construction industry.

It is becoming clear from the hon. Gentleman's article and his comments this evening about the agency's need for additional funds where he will get those funds. The streamlining of the agencies will provide funding not just for the WDA, but for the new Welsh Assembly. Eliminating those valuable bodies that have done worthwhile work for Wales may be one way of funding the assembly.

Mr. Davies: I did not say that

Sir Wyn Roberts: Even if the hon. Gentleman did not say it, he wrote it.

Mr. Davies: I did not.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The words are staring us in the face. We know what he means by "streamlining" the operations. Whatever happens, I hope, for the sake of the people of Wales, that the agency will not be diverted from its main tasks, which it has performed with great distinction.

8.12 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I welcome the opportunity to debate the Welsh Development Agency. More than 20 years ago, I had the privilege of introducing the Second Reading debate, as we have been reminded this evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) looks to the future of the WDA. I read his article in *The Western Mail*, and I did not get the impression formed by the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts). Streamlining is a bogeyman—a windmill that the right hon. Gentleman has erected to have it knocked down. Nobody else in his right senses—I do not mean to be unduly disparaging about the right hon. Gentleman, whom I have known for a long time and whom I regard with great friendship—would come to that conclusion.

My understanding of what my hon. Friend was saying is that, first, we need to examine the role of the WDA after 20 years. Surely that must be right. Secondly, we must examine how it fits in with the other economic agencies in Wales. Thirdly, we must reform where necessary. Is there anything wrong with that? I should have thought that Conservative Members would grasp the opportunity with both hands.

I had the privilege of setting up three bodies in Wales that have survived 18 years of Tory rule. They have survived because the Conservative party could not think of anything better. Over that time, the economic problems have increased.

[Mr. John Morris]

I shall remind the House why the WDA, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Land Authority for Wales were set up. Contrary to the expectations of my officials, we got two major economic Bills on the legislative programme, and a large part of a third. The WDA was parallel to the Scottish Development Agency. Through the good offices of Lord Callaghan, who took a great interest, we got the measure through because of that parallel.

The measure's primary purpose was to deal with the inevitable rundown of the steel, coal and slate industries. The Conservatives did their damnedest to oppose the measure. They tried to delay it, they voted against it on Second Reading—the right hon. Member for Conwy is the only Welsh Tory left in the House of the 158 Conservatives who voted against—and, in Committee, they opposed some of the powers of the agency that they have since clutched to their bosoms.

I made a personal pledge on the DBRW many years before I came to the House. The aim was to bring together and put on a statutory basis all the non-statutory bodies in mid-Wales, in fulfilment of Huw T. Edwards' council for Wales report. I believed that the fine touch of the paintbrush that the DBRW could bring would be able to deal with the small problems in many areas that the WDA could not manage because it would be immersed in the huge problems of the major industries.

The Land Authority for Wales is unique. It has done very well from the time of its first chairman, Baroness White of Rhymney. I commend it for bringing together parcels of land, including in my constituency. There is nothing like it in the rest of the United Kingdom. John Silkin introduced the Bill and I had the privilege of winding up on it. He told me that he wished that he could have done the same in England. Regrettably, there was no regional parallel, and perhaps the regions of England lacked the political will to set up such a body.

I praise the Government for having allowed the three bodies to survive. Each has done a great deal of work. My only wish is that they had had more resources.

I regret the short, unhappy period that the WDA has been through. The choice of people to run it—a political decision—and the lack of Welsh Office control reflect badly on the Welsh Office, particularly its administrators. Enough has been said and written, and I shall not repeat it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly will shortly have control of the WDA. When I set the agency up, in accordance with the terms of the Act I had the privilege of choosing the first chief executive. Now that is a matter for the board. I do not think that we have yet been told who the new chief executive is to be—I am sorry that I missed the first few minutes of the Secretary of State's speech. When shall we be told?

That is an important issue, and we should know at the earliest opportunity. The job is too big to be left fallow, being carried out on an acting basis, however estimable the people concerned, who are trying their best. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly may well have to keep an eye on that when he becomes Secretary of State.

I do not know what the current pattern is. The Secretary of State may have improved on what happened when I was involved. I had monthly meetings with the chairman and the chief executive. We considered what had happened during the past month and what was going to happen in the next month, perhaps looking further ahead. There were guidelines. Perhaps they are still there. Perhaps the machinery has been improved. I hope so, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The period when the WDA went out of control—the DBRW went a little out of control as well—showed how palsied the grasp of the Welsh Office was on these important agencies.

There is always a danger that such a body, like a nationalised industry, will create its own momentum and get out of the control of the Government Department, adopting its own self-defence mechanism and its own machinery of secrecy. I had to deal with that as a very young man, with the National Coal Board and, later, the railways. Indeed, I had to help to remove the chairman of the British Railways Board. That had never been done before. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly was right to say that there must be clear lines of political responsibility and accountability—lines that were lacking during that difficult period.

Let me deal briefly with the power to spend. In today's *The Western Mail*, my hon. Friend said:

> "Expenditure is set to be cut by £10m in real terms this year, and in the past few years the Welsh Office grant was first slashed to £25m and now restored to its previous level of £85m. Such arbitrary decisions are a handicap to long-term planning."

My hon. Friend underplayed it. Whatever the amount at the WDA's disposal, what is needed is some assurance for the future, along with some consistency. The decisions to which my hon. Friend referred are not a "handicap", but the antithesis of long-term planning—if he was right in what he said.

I commend what has been done by successive Secretaries of State, and by the WDA, about inward investment; but it is bananas to suggest, as some industrial commentator suggested the other day, that it all began in 1983. It began long before my time, or my predecessor's. Members of the development corporation, including Douglas Badham and Meirion Lewis, all played their part.

Like the Secretary of State, no doubt, I have spent long, weary hours, day after day, talking to banks and other financial institutions in various countries—Japan, in particular—not knowing, because the people were so courteous, whether I was making any impact. When I arrived in the Welsh Office, Sony employed 200 people, and National Panasonic had not yet come to Wales. Ford has come in our time, and a host of other expansions has taken place.

It takes years for decisions about inward investment to be made. I commend what has been done with regard to LG, but I should like to know how long the campaign has taken. I know that it will continue long after the Secretary of State has gone to other pastures—it is a continuous process—but we should be glad of the results, wherever they come from, as long as the impetus is there and the good work goes on.

Along with a number of my colleagues representing West Glamorgan and counties further west, such as Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire, I went to see the Secretary of State, who is always extremely courteous and willing to see hon. Members. We drew attention to our difficulties.

As I have said, I welcome what has happened with LG—or will happen—but we were anxious about the fact that we had not received our share of the cake.

The Secretary of State spelled out today what he indicated to us then. He has not much time to fulfil his pledge—this was a deathbed repentance—but I welcome it, none the less. He said that he would tilt the balance, in regard to financial and other incentives, in favour of areas that had not gained in the past. That is good news, although it has come late in the day.

On 28 January, the Secretary of State kindly answered a question that I had asked. I asked how many new industries had made inward investments in the past five years, and was told that there had been additions to some existing industries. I was pleased to hear about Sumitomo, and offer my congratulations. Nevertheless, against the background of the jobs—at least 10,000—that have been lost in my local steel industry, the Sumitomo investment will not mean many jobs. If there has been only one new overseas investor in five years, something must be wrong.

We have great expectations of the WDA and BP Chemicals Ltd., which have joined forces to plan an energy park. New industries may well come to that park: I hope so. I believe that the chairman of the WDA went to the area last May. It is high time that the promise made then was kept, and a start made on the infrastructure, roads and amenities to attract visiting industrialists. I hope that the work will start before too long.

Believe it or not, Wales is not lushly provided with large industrial areas likely to attract incoming industry, and we should therefore maximise those that we have. We should not split them up into penny packets, and when we have them we should market them as hard as we can. I wish the WDA well, and hope that my area sees some fruits from the endeavours of inward investors before long. I also wish my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly well in his task of piloting the WDA in the near future.

8.25 pm

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): Judging by his speech, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) learnt his economics at TUC conference fringe meetings. He turned down my attempt to intervene on him when he raised the issue of a Welsh Assembly; I shall say to him now what I wanted to say earlier. He has written a letter putting the case—as he sees it—for a Welsh Assembly, which has been circulated by local authorities. I should like to know who paid for them to circulate it. Public funds may have been used to promote party propaganda.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have rightly congratulated the WDA on the successes that it has achieved over many years, but others have been involved in those successes. Attention should be drawn to the considerable role played by the Department in the achievements of which we continually read. Nor, so far, have we heard about the economic context in which the WDA and the Welsh Office have been operating. Ultimately, whether people invest from outside—or reinvest from inside—depends on their confidence in the country's economy: for any investor, the bottom line is the return that he expects to receive.

The macro-economic context in which the WDA has achieved its successes is unparalleled in western Europe, certainly nowadays. We live in a time of historically low inflation and interest rates, and a stable and strong currency. One of the most important factors, which certainly did not exist 20 years ago, is our flexible work force. Inward investors are always comparing the current flexibility with the position 15 or 20 years ago. At that time, Britain was known as the sick man of Europe because of its poor industrial relations, whereas today it is widely recognised as the enterprise centre of Europe.

Such confidence and stability as we now enjoy could be undermined by our European partners' policies, which they would have us implement, in particular the working time directive, which would damage jobs and prospects of inward investment, and a minimum wage. Again, for anyone selling the economy and the prospect of investing in this country, those policies would be to the detriment of future investment. Another reason—which people seldom recognise publicly—why people from abroad invest in Wales and Great Britain is that we are an English-speaking nation.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned changes in policy or in the modus operandi of the Welsh Development Agency. Many of us who represent seats in north Wales, mid-Wales or west Wales would welcome that greatly. He said that greater emphasis would now be placed on the parts of Wales with high unemployment, which, by and large, are perceived by many who live in those regions to have been disadvantaged, so his statement is timely.

Opposition Members will recognise that, these days, unemployment in their constituencies, which traditionally has been high, is very low compared with before. That reflects the success of the Government's macro-economic policy and of the WDA's policy.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), a near neighbour of mine, mention unemployment in his constituency. Judging by the House of Commons Library publication on unemployment by constituency, unemployment in Alyn and Deeside stands at some 4.8 per cent., but the Welsh average is 7.4 per cent. I see many Opposition Members who I am sure are delighted at the much lower unemployment in their constituencies. For example, in Islwyn, the level is 5.4 per cent., in Delyn it is 5.6 per cent., in Pontypridd it is 5.6 per cent, in Bridgend it is 5.7 per cent. and in Wrexham it is 5.8 per cent. All those unemployment levels are much lower than they have been and reflect the Government's success.

At the top end of the scale of unemployment levels, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State addressed in his speech, we have Caernarfon at 11.1 per cent., Pembroke at 10.8 per cent.—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Although this is a Second Reading debate and therefore, by definition, reasonably broad, the hon. Gentleman is stretching the case. May I ask him to return to the substance of the Bill?

Mr. Richards: I was welcoming my right hon. Friend's remarks that the Welsh Development Agency will be addressing the regions with much higher unemployment, which are to the north and west of Wales. The unemployment level in regions where it has been traditionally high is far more acceptable—if unemployment is ever acceptable—than it might otherwise have been.

I should like my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, when he replies to the debate, to address one or two questions, although he may not have the opportunity to comment on

[Mr. Richards]

them then; I hope, however, that he will find time to write to me about them. The first is on the distribution of the Welsh Development Agency budget. One of the concerns that we have in the north and rural parts of Wales involves forward commitments, within the properties budget, in different regions. It appears that the forward commitments, certainly in south Wales, are a high proportion of the budget allocated to that region, whereas the forward commitments elsewhere tend to be lower.

That creates a certain inflexibility in relation to future investment. What tends to happen is that, because of the high propensity towards forward commitments, moneys are moved from the regions that appear to have funds to spare and are transferred from one region to another. That means that in, for example, parts of north Wales, funds are not always available—this, I believe, is the position at present—to acquire land or to bring about the infrastructure changes that are necessary to attract investors, be they indigenous or from overseas. That critically affects forward planning in—in my case—north Wales, so the question to my hon. Friend the Minister is: what is the distribution of capital investment by geographic region and how does he expect that to be addressed?

The other point is the cost per job. Clearly, as I mentioned, investment is a matter of confidence in the economy, but confidence varies from region to region. I mentioned unemployment levels in parts of south Wales. Business and economic confidence in those parts would clearly be greater than, say, in Ynys Môn or in parts of Pembroke, where unemployment is high. Therefore, the case must be put—I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State addressed this in his speech—that the cost per job should be greater, or should be allowed to be greater, in regions where unemployment is very high.

We have all heard about the impact that 6,000 jobs from LG will have on Newport's economy, but the equivalent in a place such as Holyhead would be 50 jobs. There needs to be a greater allowance, to attract jobs to the parts of Wales that are perceived as economically unattractive. Therefore, it would greatly benefit us in north Wales to know precisely what the cost per job has been historically, and what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is prepared to allow the Welsh Development Agency to spend in future.

I take my hat off, as did the hon. Member for Caerphilly, not just to the chairman and board of the Welsh Development Agency, but obviously to all the staff who work there, as well as to officials in my right hon. Friend's Department who have contributed. In some cases, local authorities have also made a significant contribution towards attracting investment from many parts of the world.

8.38 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I am sure that it will not have escaped your attention, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, as the debate was starting, there were two interventions from hon. Members representing constituencies in Cornwall—one of them my hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor). Those interventions told their own story, that the Welsh Development Agency and indeed the Development Board for Rural Wales have been considerable successes, that they are envied in other parts of Britain and that Wales's attractions, which have no need of poaching but which are facilitated by Wales's economic development agencies, give us in Wales a significant advantage in trying to obtain the jobs that are capable of coming from elsewhere. The successes of the WDA and the DBRW tell us that others should perhaps be given the opportunity of setting up development agencies of their own where they do not exist, for they, too, could benefit from the disciplines that can be applied by those agencies.

I wish to pay tribute to the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris). In the 14 years that I have represented Montgomeryshire, I have seen the fruit of the vision that he had when he created the Development Board for Rural Wales. When he created the DBRW, he had a clear and close understanding of rural, mid and west Wales. The board has worked extremely well. I am sure that he acknowledges that change is necessary as the years go by, and that the way in which the organisations function must change from time to time.

In my view, the linkage provided by Mr. Rowe-Beddoe during his chairmanship of both organisations has been valuable for two reasons. First, both the WDA and the DBRW went through short periods of which they cannot be proud, and there was good reason for ensuring that the management disciplines that were applied were extremely rigorous. Mr. Rowe-Beddoe applies rigorous management disciplines, and the performance of the senior executives in both organisations is evidence of that.

Secondly, the linkage has been useful because it has enabled the two organisations not merely to work closely together, but to learn more of each other's differing disciplines. However, it would be a disastrous mistake if any member of any political party or any Government were to take the view that there was now no need to distinguish between the way in which economic development should be managed in rural, mid and west Wales and the way in which it should be managed in the rest of Wales. The problems remain as different now as they were when the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon set up the two organisations. They were set up quite deliberately, as he said in his speech, to represent separate requirements and needs.

The farming community upon which mid-Wales depends is different in every possible way from the former mining or steel communities of south and north Wales, not just in its job patterns, but in its structure. The continuing threat to what is still Wales's largest industry, agriculture, and the fortunately gradual, rather than sudden, decline in the number of jobs in that industry, require the continuing care of an organisation that is different from the WDA, an organisation that can take a more gradual approach.

If I wish to pay particular tribute to the work that has been done by the DBRW in the past two or three years, I can do so merely by pointing to the small new factories that are springing up, for example, just outside Welshpool, which has not had its full share of development. Also, more is happening west of the Newtown area which, at one time, had the concentration of development. I hope that the linkage between a better resourced WDA, as provided for by the Bill, and the DBRW will continue for a long time.

I wish to repeat a plea that I made recently in the Welsh Grand Committee, for a particular focus to be given in the future to the indigenous industries of Wales. It is wonderful for the Newport area to have the LG development, and any major incoming investment must be greeted with open arms. However, the DBRW has not always been the most popular organisation in mid-Wales, as it is said that sometimes, but not always, it gives the impression that it gives its all to outside investment coming in—particularly when a Japanese, German or Korean name is attached to it—but pays little attention to indigenous development.

That is not true, and it is not an accusation that I make. However, in my view, more can be done to develop indigenous industries within Wales. The Source Wales scheme is but an example of what can be done. But more can be achieved, particularly by focusing small-scale help on the development of new skills in Welsh factories—especially in the remoter parts of Wales.

In a recent Welsh Grand Committee debate, I made a particular plea for a part of the service industry in Newtown, in mid-Wales. The DBRW was, at the time, refusing to sell buildings to a successful business based in Newtown, called Charlie's Stores Ltd., which has grown from a street stall to a company with a turnover in excess of £10 million a year. The flexibility of Mr. Rowe-Beddoe was demonstrated to me today, when I received a letter from him informing me that an agreement had been reached to sell the premises to Charlie's Stores Ltd. Such a change in attitude towards indigenous industry will, I hope, be developed by the WDA and the DBRW.

It is often said—although I do not believe it to be the case—that the cleverest people in Wales become Members of this House, civil servants, schoolteachers, doctors and, dare I say, lawyers, but that they are bad at becoming entrepreneurs. I do not believe that to be the case at all, as there are examples of good Welsh entrepreneurs. They may not be directors of Tesco, but they are evident in other spheres.

I hope very much that the WDA—in spending whatever extra money is made available to it as a result of the Bill—will go out and look for Welsh winners for Welsh industry, to help the development of the industry of the future. We want to see a long perspective in the process. Above all, we should be looking for an evolution in Welsh industry that will lead not only to foreign companies coming into Wales, but to Welsh-grown companies—as Laura Ashley did in years gone by, and as Control Techniques from my constituency has done successfully—going to other countries and other continents to open Welsh companies. In doing so, they will show that Wales not just receives the crumbs from the rich man's table, but can be the rich man, too.

8.46 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The Bill has been welcomed enthusiastically on both sides of the House, and I, too, pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), who piloted the original legislation through the House. We should also remember that the original Welsh Development Agency Act was passed in 1975 by a Government who believed that Governments should intervene in the economy; who believed that Governments should intervene positively to reduce disparities—in this case regional disparities—within the United Kingdom; and who believed that Governments can make a difference.

That is an old-fashioned view and, in some ways, this is an old-fashioned Bill. It is a kind of old Labour-ish Bill, as it increases borrowing and financial limits. The Welsh Development Agency is the only agency left in Britain which can intervene economically. Scotland does not have its development agency any more—it has gone, and is now called something else. It is with some pleasure that I notice that, despite all the fashion for global markets, the ideology of small government, the jargon about partnerships and the philosophy of communautarianism, we are all here this evening extolling the virtues of central Government using taxpayers' money to intervene in the economy. Perhaps there is still hope for that somewhat tarnished, old-fashioned view.

I read in the excellent briefing paper produced at the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) by the Secretary of State that there will be substantial increases in Government expenditure. There are problems, and the bottom line may not be as good as the figures I shall mention, but for 1996–97 the original figure was £40 million and the outturn—that lovely Treasury word—will be £65 million, an increase of 60 per cent. I must applaud a Government who increase public expenditure in a year by 60 per cent. The following year, the figure is up to £84.7 million, a further increase of 30 per cent. We can congratulate the Government on that at least. In a world of low taxation and balanced budgets, the increase is refreshing.

Despite its ups and downs, the WDA has made a difference. No institution is perfect, and every organisation has its problems occasionally. Sadly, despite the difference it has made, Wales is now the poorest region in Britain. Wales has the lowest gross domestic product per head of population. The other day, I was reading the budget put out by the Welsh Office. It is difficult to have regional budgets in a centralised economy and state such as Britain. It tells a horrendous story. It tells of a massive difference between the money that is raised in Wales through taxation and the money that Wales receives—properly—by way of public expenditure.

The difference can be illustrated by considering the financial deficit figure, or borrowing requirement. The budget is now two or three years old, but as of today the Welsh financial deficit in the United Kingdom economy is about 15 per cent. The budget mentions 20 per cent., but that is the figure from two years ago. Despite the difference made by the WDA, the Welsh economy still has a financial deficit of about 15 per cent. France and Germany are having trouble reducing their deficits from 4 per cent. to 3 per cent. to meet the Maastricht treaty conditions. The scale of a 15 per cent. deficit demonstrates the still sad state of the Welsh economy after 18 years of Conservative government.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have made the point that, in the quest for major inward investment in manufacturing industry, the WDA and the Welsh Office have, in the past 17 years, neglected an area that I describe as industrial west Wales. Industrial west Wales extends from the west of Bridgend to the western end of my constituency of Llanelli. I may be being slightly churlish because, as the Minister may point out if he has time when he winds up, Llanelli has received large sums from the

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

WDA for land reclamation, environmental works and the regeneration of its town centre. I accept that and I welcome it. Those projects have improved the environment and generated some, but not much, economic activity. However, the money has not created the sort of wealth that is required. In industrial west Wales and in Llanelli, we still have a problem of high unemployment, especially among young people, low activity rates and low income per head.

About 30 per cent. of those who are employed in my constituency still work in production, mainly manufacturing and engineering. That figure is probably somewhat higher than the average for industrial west Wales. We have some excellent companies, as do other nearby constituencies. Many of the companies are car component firms. We have five or six that can, and do, compete with the best in the world; the same is true of some of the factories in my hon. Friends' constituencies in industrial west Wales. The area needs major inward investment in manufacturing engineering, as it is now described. Because of the car component plants, I believe that the area could now support a major car assembly plant.

I welcome the Secretary of State's statement that the emphasis may change, but I hope that the guidelines permeate down to the WDA in Swansea and the so-called Swansea bay partnership. A deliberate decision has been made in the past not to go for inward investment, but to support and nurture existing industry. That is fine, and I do not decry it, but we miss out on major inward investment.

Some time ago, the Mercedes car company announced that it was to build a small car, the Swatch, outside Germany. It is to be built just on the French side of the Franco-German border. At the time of the announcement, I tried to discover how a constituency such as Llanelli could attract that investment. I found it difficult to penetrate the bureaucracies, especially that of the WDA, to find out what was going on. I was told that Mercedes had employed a firm of management consultants in Boston and that nobody except Government agencies was allowed to talk to it.

Finally, I was able to obtain—unofficially—a list of Mercedes' seven requirements. My constituency fitted all of them, as did those of my hon. Friends in industrial west Wales. There was not one requirement that we could not have fulfilled. One of the main requirements was for clean air and for the site not to be too close to factories that pollute the air. That would be possible in Llanelli.

The problem was not one of resources. We are close enough to major highways, ports and an airport to satisfy all the requirements. I pointed that out to various people and was told that Mercedes was interested only in the north-east of England. I never got that in writing, and I do not know who made the decision. I was never told that by Mercedes. I suspect that the decision was made by the Department of Trade and Industry— I suspect that it was the Invest in Britain Bureau. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) is not here, but he set that bureau up in 1974. It has become the "Invest in England" bureau. I do not decry that. England has to have that sort of investment arm, serviced by the Department of Trade and Industry, but I suspect that all this nonsense about Mercedes not being prepared to go anywhere in Britain but the north-east of England came from that bureau.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): My right hon. Friend must appreciate that this is merely a case of history repeating itself. Lord Walker's autobiography—as Peter Walker, he was Secretary of State for Wales—clearly states that the Toyota motor company was to build its manufacturing plant in Newport. As a result of the intervention of the Prime Minister of the day, Lady Thatcher, it was sent to more marginal political territory in Derby.

Mr. Davies: Unlike my hon. Friend, I have not had the pleasure of reading Lord Walker's autobiography. Perhaps one of these days I shall. I do not know, but I suspect that the Invest in Britain Bureau exists to attract industry to England, and we must be sure that we get our fair share.

There should be a change in policy for industrial west Wales. We are ready for a major car assembly plant. Such plants do not grow on trees. I understand the problems, but as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon said, preparatory work has to be done for many years. That work has to start now, and it is to be hoped that it will bear fruit in a few years.

8.59 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) described this as an old-fashioned Bill. Indeed it is, and thank God for it.

Not only is this an old-fashioned Bill, but the agency ought to be fulfilling a couple of old-fashioned functions. It is worth reminding ourselves what its early functions, both of which it inherited, were. The first was industrial estate development; the second was the derelict land reclamation programme. The first function had previously been conducted by the estates corporations; the second by the Welsh Office, particularly after the Aberfan disaster.

The first function was nothing new. Indeed, in some ways the agency continues a great tradition. In the early days, the Government discovered that investment was necessary to deal with the problems of large-scale unemployment in particular areas. The first industrial estate in Wales was a result of the first U-turn by the then National Conservative Government of 1935. Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Chamberlain, who had raised to a fine art the principle of non-intervention—to the point that they tried to transfer large populations out of our communities—were driven by the threat of an election in 1935 to announce that they were willing to finance the Treforest industrial estate. It was the instrument by which the first major inward investors came into Wales. It is interesting that, of the 70-odd companies that came to Wales in the late 1930s, 49 were a result of Jewish immigration from central and eastern Europe. They were the first inward investors into the south Wales economy as we know it today.

I draw attention to the history of industrial development because, after the war, Government power and the investment of Government money brought small industrial developments into mining communities and mining villages, which created new manufacturing opportunities where only the coal and iron industries had

offered employment. The development of those small industrial estates and groups of factories helped us to diversify, and created the post-war south Wales economy.

One of the worrying aspects of the drift in the Welsh Development Agency budget is the way in which smaller industrial estates are being sacrificed for large inward investments. I must plead with Ministers, and especially with my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) when he assumes ministerial responsibility in the coming months, for the traditional role of the WDA in developing small industrial estates in communities that cannot attract or physically fit the large inward investment developments that we have seen in recent years. Those small developments should be just as much of a priority. They should be part of any WDA strategy or budget.

I was at the meeting of the heads of the valleys standing conference last Monday, when the Secretary of State was presented with a list of the smaller industrial estate developments that could take place, but which seem to have been put on stop because of the WDA's budgetary problems.

The second function that the Welsh Development Agency inherited was land reclamation. The agency assumed what had previously been the direct responsibility of the Welsh Office. Indeed, had it not been for the Welsh Office decision to clear the land at Pentrebach in 1975, there would not have been a site to attract the first Korean inward investment that was announced only a few months ago.

The Halla Engineering scheme was brought to a site that was cleared under a land reclamation programme as early as 1976–77. That programme has played an enormous and vital part in the regeneration of our mining communities. The Secretary of State told us that the amount of land reclaimed could have filled X thousand football pitches; ironically, in many cases—certainly in my community—it is football pitches that people want to develop in the reclamation programmes, to create a balanced recreational facility in a community in which tips and waste once lay.

There is great bitterness in communities such as Treharris, Trelewis and Bedlinog that have watched the vandalism of the accelerated pit closure programme. They were left with all the problems, and now we are told that the WDA does not have the money to develop those sites and clear the waste land, offering new opportunities and a new environment to the villages. The Minister came and saw for himself, and he will have understood and appreciated the strength of feeling about the delays—indeed, the stop—to land reclamation programmes as a result of the WDA's current budgetary problems.

The Secretary of State kept on referring to the targets that he intends to set. Some are like Soviet grain targets; a figure that has been plucked out and which it is assumed will be reached. There was a specific target that we took seriously: that for land reclamation by 2000. That objective was set by Welsh Office Ministers and should be met, but on present budgetary plans, and certainly on present WDA performance, it will not be.

We are all, understandably, fighting over funds for millennium projects of one kind or another. That target was something to aim at for the millennium, but unless there is a significant change of heart and improvement in the WDA's land reclamation budget, it will not be met.

My strong plea is not necessarily made to my hon. Friends the incoming Ministers, because I hope that in the last few weeks of this Administration we can have an announcement of some unlocking of money to restart some of our land reclamation schemes. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly knows all too well that there are constituency as well as national problems, and I hope that he, too, will regard restarting the programmes as a major priority, to remove the embittered feeling in many of our communities caused by the fact that lots of development is being carried out not too far away, while the much-needed and well-deserved changes that people expected in their immediate environment are not happening.

That brings me to a third function that the WDA, with its added financial capacity, should take up the challenge of assuming. In many of our small mining communities, alongside the bigger developments such as LG in Newport, Halla Engineering or the significant developments along the heads of the valleys road, there is a growing dereliction. Shops and houses that cannot be sold have been boarded up. The image of dereliction in many small mining villages is in sharp contrast to the glitzy sex appeal of international inward investment.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): And Cardiff bay.

Mr. Rowlands: As my hon. Friend says, that also applies to Cardiff bay. We spent many months making that case.

Along with chasing great international inward investments, and the excitement and adrenaline that doubtless runs in the veins of those who go in search of it, let us have some energy, innovation and imagination put in to support community enterprise and local regeneration. We need to ensure that the planning is right.

The closure of sub-post offices and chemists is the deadly sign of the loss of community in our mining villages. With it comes the boarding up of properties. Let us have local joint ventures of the sort that we have seen on the grander scale; let us have assisted development of the sort from which Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney has benefited in recent years. Alongside the bigger, wider programme, let us have community enterprise development and an agency that can combine with local authorities and the Welsh Office to regenerate our communities at local level.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that the LG investment in Newport is not negative from the point of view of the valleys? I come from the valleys, but I have found that people from there flock in their hundreds and thousands to work in Newport and Cardiff. That will happen again.

Mr. Rowlands: I hope that I have not suggested that I in any way oppose LG. The opposite is true. I am not so parochial that I do not realise the major role that LG will play in employment opportunities throughout the communities that surround the site near Newport, but let us also have some imagination and effort put into community development through joint venture schemes. The WDA has undertaken big, urban, commercial renewals, but it has not carried the same principles, efforts, energy and imagination down into our local communities. The partnerships and joint venture schemes that exist at one level should be delivered at another.

[Mr. Rowlands]

I have pleaded for more public money. I will be accused by the Government, and perhaps by my Front Bench, of breaking the Government-Brown diktats on public expenditure. We are talking about small sums of money. The Secretary of State was suddenly able to find £25 million to increase the WDA's budget. I did not notice taxes go up or public borrowing explode as a result. For the life of me, I cannot understand why, in the Welsh Office's £6.8 billion budget, we cannot find an additional £25 million. It should not be beyond the ingenuity of my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly to go through the budget after the general election and find such a sum.

A Welsh Office budget of £6.7 billion was forecast for 1995-96, yet the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), forecast a budget of £6.890 billion—£190 million more. Such changes between forecasts and outturn must be noted. The right hon. Member for Wokingham, whom I never took to be a great lover of public expenditure, forecast a budget for the Welsh Office for 1996–97 of £7 billion. That was his forecast.

Given the large sums of money involved, the planning, the outturns and estimates, all we are saying is that an extra £25 million should be found on top of the current planned expenditure to unlock the WDA's land reclamation budget and restore some of the financing that is necessary for it to carry out the core functions for which it has been responsible since its creation.

9.14 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): This debate has latched on to the central issues as they affect our country, Wales. I thought that the Secretary of State made an emollient and typically courteous speech. I thought that my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State gave the speech of a man savouring the prospect of office within weeks.

Two essential points have been made in the debate. First, right hon. and hon. Members very much hope to see more investment from indigenous companies, notwithstanding their welcome for overseas investment. Secondly, we would like to emphasise our wish that the WDA should offer even-handed treatment across Wales. Right hon. and hon. Members have expressed some anxiety that that may not be happening. I do not wish to be controversial, but that is an important point to bear in mind in the years ahead.

Hon. Members have tried to emphasise the context in which the WDA is being debated. There is a historical context that can be understood by consideration of Ben Pimlott's biography of Hugh Dalton and the autobiography of the late Douglas Jay. Those books offer a history of the germ of regional policy. They reveal how those two great figures of the Labour movement, who worked as civil servants in the second world war, were responsible for the first conscious acts to prepare regional policy. From memory, I believe that Douglas Jay recounts how he encouraged, with the help of some Welshmen, the development of the first planned industrial estate, which was located in Bridgend. It was followed by others in central Scotland.

Mr. Roy Hughes: The first was Nylon Spinners.

Mr. Jones: Yes, my hon. Friend is right.

I see this debate as an anniversary of the debate on the creation of the WDA. I should like to emphasise the major role that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) played in its creation. I remember the day when he opened the Second Reading of the Bill in which the agency was proposed to this honourable House. I had the honour of winding up for the Government. I recollect how the then Nicholas Edwards, who represented Her Majesty's Opposition, gave an unwelcoming, carping and grudging response to Labour Ministers' proposals in the middle of the 1970s. At the conclusion of the debate, the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) wound up for the Opposition and he, too, offered the same regretful, unwelcoming and carping response to my right hon. and learned Friend's creation of the WDA. That approach continued in the Standing Committee, in which I piloted the Bill alongside my late colleague, Alec Jones.

I also remember from that Second Reading that Peter Walker, now Lord Walker, made a grudging intervention in which he claimed the credit that he seemed to think he should be given for the idea of the WDA.

Nicholas Edwards, who later became Secretary of State and who is now in another place, would not have been able to survive as a Cabinet Minister without the instruments of economic power that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon had bequeathed him. There was a time, in the early 1980s, when unemployment in Wales according to the official figures exceeded 180,000—indeed, the number of unemployed people in Wales edged close to 200,000. Having said that, under successive Secretaries of State, the agency has been a great success. It had to be, because, in the early 1980s, there were major disasters in manufacturing industry in Wales, not least the colossal losses in man-made fibre jobs, brickmaking jobs and steelmaking jobs, as at Shotton steelworks in my constituency. In this debate, however, we must acknowledge the agency's successes throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

I have an agenda concerning my own constituency that I want to put to the Secretary of State. I shall first mention townships such as Connah's Quay, Shotton, Queensferry, and Buckley: to some extent, the agency has invested in Deeside and in those communities, but it is the wish of Flintshire county council and of my constituents that there be more investment. I give as an example the township of Queensferry where many of the shop fronts are now boarded up and are not operating in the interests of the citizens of that locality. To some extent, the same may be said of the township of Shotton. We have suffered considerably from man-made fibre plant closures, from steelmaking job losses and from cyclical redundancies in the aerospace industry, in addition to redundancies in the cement industry and in brickmaking. In all this, we have instanced the need for the agency to back us fully and to give us every possible help.

Mention has been made of Mr. Rowe-Beddoe and his chairmanship of the agency. Through my observation of the agency's leadership over many years, I know that he has been a success of a particular kind. His discipline over his executives and employees is severe—some of his detractors say that he is something of an Attila the Hun, but if he is and if he has made the agency more leak-proof and disciplined, so be it. In all my remarks, my hope has been to see the agency as being the means and the instrument by which my constituency might suffer less unemployment.

The agency has made the Deeside industrial park one of the finest in western Europe. Nevertheless, there are some requirements: we want the industrial park to be given a railway station of its own on the Wrexham-Birkenhead line and I would ask the Government to consider how that objective might be achieved. Likewise, there is a disused railway line from the industrial park to the city of Chester and it is our wish that the line might become a dedicated road, which would help to lessen traffic jams and the consequent pollution on Deeside. The agency may be of help to us in bringing that scheme to fruition. I very much hope that Ministers will respond positively on those two points.

Bearing in mind the pressures on time, and bearing in mind the fact that I had the chance to catch your eye last week, Madam Speaker, I resume my seat.

9.24 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): We are having this debate on the Welsh Development Agency in the last few weeks of this Parliament. Opening the debate, the Secretary of State said that he at last recognised that various distortions had arisen in Wales that had not been corrected and that he proposed to tilt the agency's balance of policy more in the direction of west Wales and north-west Wales, which have not so far benefited. The difficulty is that it is the end of the Parliament so, when we urge the facts, which do need remedy, really we are preaching to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and urging him to take up that challenge, because we will be unable to see the fruit of the apparent and intended change of policy.

There has been a marked degree of consensus about the value of the agency's role. My city, Swansea, has benefited substantially from joint ventures with the agency, especially in Swansea vale and Castle quays, but the record on inward investment is not good on the whole. For example, there has been no major investment in Swansea bay or in the area that includes Llanelli during the existence of the Welsh Development Agency.

There is an increasing perception in political and business circles in south-west Wales that the agency—and the Welsh Office, which presides over it—are countenancing a widening gap between the economic performance of south-east and south-west Wales. Yes, the division of the agency's responsibilities into three regions is important, but Bridgend is included in the south-west Wales region, and that masks the problems that have showed themselves further west, so a misleading impression is given of the performance west of Bridgend.

I hope that what the Secretary of State said will be taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly, but much damage has been done in the past, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) showed clearly, by what the Government may call working with the grain, which in effect negates the key aim of regional policy to reduce internal imbalances as well as imbalances between England and Wales.

There have been specific examples of diversion of investment projects from west Wales to Cardiff bay, such as one from Baglan, in the constituency of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon. Much damage was done by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) in reducing the grant in aid for the agency to £25 million at a time when the Cardiff Bay development corporation was receiving slightly more than twice that amount in grant in aid. I understand the concept of making a flagship of the capital city, but it is now generally recognised in Wales that the Government have gone too far in that direction to the detriment of balanced development throughout Wales.

The West Wales chamber of commerce has sent a questionnaire to its members, the results of which are to be returned today, on precisely that theme. As the Secretary of State should know, there has been considerable disquiet in south-west Wales on that subject. Yes, we all rejoice that LG has gone to Newport, but there is now a major site, for which planning procedures are almost completed, at Velindre in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell). That would have a major impact on the economy of south-west Wales, and it is there that the present Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly, his successor, should exert their energies to try to get a major investment at Velindre to match that at LG in Newport.

We need greater commitment and positive action to reduce the growing divide between east and west Wales. Given what the Secretary of State has said today, I concede that I may be pushing at a door that has opened, but that will never stop a politician pressing harder and harder. I hope that the lesson will be learnt. The facts of the current disparities are clear, and have been clear for a long time. At last, this Secretary of State seems to have recognised those disparities. I look forward to his successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly, making a positive commitment to ending the disparities that have grown so alarmingly in the past years.

9.29 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The debate has ranged far and wide, although it is about the financial limits of the Welsh Development Agency. Those limits are relevant to the WDA's activities and how quickly it exhausts the limits previously set. The key question that has emerged from this wide-ranging debate—this seemed to scandalise Welsh Office Ministers and former Ministers, such as the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts)—is whether it is right for us to accuse the Conservative Government, who are now reaching their fag end, of having an ambivalent attitude towards the WDA, even since its inception in 1975. Although they have found the agency convenient from time to time, they have caused it to exist on a diet of feast and famine, so that it has never known quite where it stood with the Government.

The right hon. Member for Conwy accused my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) of a travesty of the truth in making that accusation against the Government. This matter is at the heart of the debate. The Secretary of State—unintentionally, I am sure—misled the House when he said that the amount that the WDA will receive next year in accordance with the financial limit set by the Bill will be greater in real terms than the amount that it received 10 years ago. He is right if one uses that comparison, but one can always pick out a year here and a year there to substantiate any claim. We should use the average figures for central Government financing of the WDA.

For the first 10 years of the WDA—from 1976 to 1985, half of which was under Labour, and just over half under the Conservatives—the amount of grant in aid and the

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

other relevant finance for the purposes of the Bill averaged £90 million a year. For each of the next 10 years—from 1986 to 1995, all of which were under the Conservatives—the amount was lower, but it was still fairly healthy at an average of £60 million a year. That is at today's prices.

Then along came the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), and all of a sudden, instead of £90 million a year on average for the first decade and £60 million a year on average for the second decade, the relevant figure—the amount of additional finance that the WDA received—suddenly dropped to £13 million, which was the second lowest figure in the history of the WDA in cash terms, let alone in real terms. That was the amount that the right hon. Member for Wokingham gave it in 1995-96, which was his first year as Secretary of State. Only in its first year, when it received £9 million—it was a new body and had not had time to set up its machinery—did the agency receive less grant in aid or have less borrowing power.

Then we had the first year of the present Secretary of State. Until the change in the budget last November, he was going to give the WDA only £17 million, which would have been the second lowest amount. That figure has shot up to £42 million, because of the extra £25 million that was supplied halfway through this financial year. The figure now looks respectable, but the Secretary of State's original intention was that it should be only £17 million. In those two successive years, the figures were £13 million, given by the right hon. Member for Wokingham, and £17 million, given by the present Secretary of State. That is a true measure.

The Secretary of State has now learnt his lesson, and has realised that being Secretary of State for Wales with the WDA at his disposal can bring him kudos. When he realised last summer that LG had signed on the dotted line, he thought, "I might become a bit higher profile as Secretary of State for Wales. I can become a slightly more important person and rise up the pecking order of the present Cabinet, and even more so of the future shadow Cabinet, if I am seen as the man who helped to bring LG to Wales."

All of a sudden, instead of the WDA being on a famine diet of only £17 million—the second lowest budget, barring its first year and the previous year under the right hon. Member for Wokingham—the Secretary of State decides to give it more money. Suddenly it is feast time again, at least to a moderate degree, and the amount of relevant finance is £42 million, which is still well below the average of the previous decade, but it is respectable. It looks as though the amount will go up to £65 million next year under the terms of the Bill, so the WDA will get a sum which is about the average of the past 10 years. That will be the time when the LG industrial development must be financed.

All that makes one wonder whether our charge that the Government are ambivalent about the WDA—making it exist on a diet of feast or famine—is not the bullseye. They have always had a problem with the WDA. That was apparent in the case of the Scottish Development Agency when it first started. The Government still do not know how they want to give the WDA the operational freedom to bring in large new inward investment and to use those big investments from outside to stimulate indigenous business in Wales to act as suppliers to the new industries.

Everyone now agrees about the farcical period of the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor, nominally the Secretary of State for Wales, but in practice the Secretary of State for Wokingham and the Tory right-wing think tanks. He was the one who crippled the WDA's operational abilities by causing it to privatise itself from the inside by selling all its major assets, which meant that it then did not have the monthly cash flow, and every time a large investor came in, the WDA had to go back to the Welsh Office for special finance. Luckily, in the case of LG, it did so successfully.

There was an American fifth cavalry charge coming over the top of the hill in November last year with an extra £25 million, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) referred. We warmly welcomed that, but it should have been a lesson to the Secretary of State that he should not continue in the tradition of the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who disgraced himself so much in his period as Secretary of State for Wales, through his attitude to the WDA, single mothers and many other issues.

The structure of the Bill is noteworthy. It will be the last measure of its kind. Henceforth, any increase in borrowing powers will be made by secondary legislation—by order. It is an unprecedented measure in the extent of its delegation to secondary legislation. It is what is known as a Henry VIII power: there is no limit on the ability by secondary legislation—

Mr. Hague *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Morgan: The Secretary of State seems to be shaking his head. Let me read from a note that I received from one of the Clerks of the House. He states:

"What is unusual about the WDA Bill, and, as far as we can discover, unprecedented, is not to impose any ceiling at all on the amount to which a limit may be raised by order. I say that cautiously because it is never easy to prove a negative."

Mr. Hague: I was shaking my head because the Bill requires affirmative resolution to raise the limit in future. That is by no means what anyone would understand as a Henry VIII power.

Mr. Morgan: The Secretary of State seems not to understand that a power has never been given by statutory instrument before, with no capping limit on it. That has never been done before. That is the view of a senior Clerk of the House. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman has a different view. We know that he was something of a wunderkind 20 years ago, and had hardly sprung from the womb when he made his famous speech in the very year that the WDA was founded. We all remember that. Perhaps the Secretary of State still thinks that he is a wunderkind and knows more about such matters than the Clerks of the House. There will be others who do not agree with him about that, but we shall have to see who is right. There is no precedent for extending the secondary legislative power in this way—the Secretary of State may be proud of that and he may think that he is Henry VIII. I am not sure, but the Clerks of the House clearly believe that the procedure is unprecedented.

It is odd that the power, as it related to the Scottish Development Agency, was passed through secondary legislation in 1990, but the next measure extending the financial limits of that agency's successor body will have to go through primary legislation because it has exhausted its secondary legislative powers. That reveals the confusion at the heart of the Government's attitude towards the Scottish Development Agency and its successor bodies and the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Rowlands: From the gist of what my hon. Friend is saying, am I to understand that he will support our amendment to remove that provision?

Mr. Morgan: I have not seen any such amendment. Has an amendment been tabled? The issue will no doubt be raised in Committee and we can see whether the Government are right. Given our proposals for a Welsh Assembly, what the Government have done is highly convenient. It would allow the democratic control, which the Government now seem anxious to take away from the Floor of the House. If there were a Welsh Assembly, I would support the Government's move. It represents an important development if the Government are trying to give us favours in terms of our future proposals for a Welsh Assembly. The Secretary of State for Health was also helpful on that front today when he introduced more confusion.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that if the power were to be transferred to the proposed Welsh Assembly, there would be no limit on the assembly's power to increase the amount, as specified in the Bill?

Mr. Morgan: It does not cause additional expenditure; it permits it—as the Secretary of State's briefing note rightly said. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Conwy, as a former Minister, would agree with that. It is a question of the loss of parliamentary control. We keep hearing about the West Lothian question, but the Government are happy to get their Members to vote for a loss of parliamentary control—I think that that was the point being made by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. There is not the same degree of parliamentary control simply because the measure cannot be amended. That is at the crux of the matter—that is why measures are being transferred to secondary legislation.

The Secretary of State is asking the House to approve the removal of the right to amend a measure by passing it over to secondary legislation, with no ultimate capping limit—that is unprecedented. The Secretary of State should have explained why he was doing that. His only explanation is that he did not realise that he was doing it. Obviously, he has not received the same briefing as I did from the Clerks of the House.

The issues involving the WDA concern all of us who represent Welsh constituencies. How do we get the balance right between east and west, between inward investors and indigenous firms? How do we ensure that when, for the first time in 20 years, the WDA hits a big inward investor such as LG, that does not absorb all its finances so that it is unable to capitalise on firms that could become suppliers? Those firms could be indigenous or they could have moved into the area. They may be on a smaller scale and it may be appropriate for them to set up in places that do not attract large numbers of commuters such as we have in south-east Wales and the Swansea area. Getting the balance right between east and west, between large and small, and between inward investors and indigenous investors is what lies at the heart of the topics raised by hon. Members today.

We have heard many comments from those who are concerned that, because the Government cannot give a sustainable commitment to fund the WDA for a two, three or four-year period and keep failing in their primary duty to provide a framework for the agency's financing, the agency does not know where it is. If the LG development proceeds in Wales, will it exhaust the agency's financial capabilities to sustain supplier industries that might be able to feed off LG, and thereby prevent building up a much stronger indigenous sector?

The final measure of whether the WDA is a success and of whether Welsh Office Ministers have looked after the WDA—although their predecessors opposed its creation—is the state of the Welsh economy. People have said that the Welsh economy is a brilliant success, because one or two big names have moved in. LG is the first mega-development for 20 years, but—for the purposes of those of us representing Welsh constituencies—the state of the Welsh economy is not explained by listing the big names and saying that LG is a great success or that JCB's expansion in north Wales is a great success. There are other great successes—such as Ocean Technical Glass moving to Cardiff, Newport Waferfad, and Halla moving into Merthyr—but the bottom line is the state of the Welsh economy.

While the gross domestic product per head in Wales remains 16 per cent. below that of the United Kingdom, it will remain true that Wales will continue to require an interventionist economic agency. The Government have never been able to make up their minds about the WDA; they remain ambivalent about it; and they would much prefer to close it down completely.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): It has been very good to have such a good-natured debate on the Bill—until the speech of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). However, I readily agree with his conjecture that one can always find a couple of figures to try to support the argument that one is inventing, because he proceeded to do precisely that in his 15 minutes. I offer him my sympathy because, judging by Opposition Members' interventions, I suspect that he will have trouble from Labour Back Benchers in Committee.

Mr. Morgan: What was I inventing? Will the Minister quote it, chapter and verse, or withdraw his comment?

Mr. Jones: I think that *Hansard* will demonstrate that very clearly tomorrow morning. I invite the hon. Gentleman to read it, to see whether he can repeat the statements a second time. However, he does not need to worry, because I have great confidence that he will not have to worry about the Welsh affairs portfolio for much longer.

This was a good-natured debate, and why not? It was about the success story of the way in which we have nurtured and developed the Welsh Development Agency.

[Mr. Jones]

It was good to hear speeches from the more senior Labour Members—if I may so call them—as they are those rare commodities on Opposition Benches: hon. Members with ministerial experience. It was good to hear from the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and from the hon. Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones).

It was especially good to hear from the two "originators"—those who took part in the original debate on setting up the WDA, my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) and the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris). My right hon. Friend very effectively nailed the claims made by Opposition Members about the way in which he and successive Secretaries of State have maintained the WDA.

I am a little surprised at the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon. Initially we knew what he wanted to say, but I always thought that he never made a more pertinent observation than, "You cannot ignore an elephant when you find it on your doorstep," which was a reference to the result of the 1979 referendum on a Welsh Assembly. He attempted to recreate the first fumbling footsteps of the child who has now been honed into the superb contributor to team Wales, which he so ably captains. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has very knowing warnings about his party going back to the old, failed policies of the past. It is very likely that the phrase in his mind will be, "It will all end in tears"—which harks back to 1979.

This debate is about a success story—about how we have used the WDA as a key part of team Wales. We are determined to make the agency even more successful in the next Parliament. I feel that that objective is very much in line with the detailed analysis presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North–West (Mr. Richards). He was absolutely right to stress the necessity of confidence in the Welsh economy. I was glad to have his welcome and that of the hon. Members for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) and for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's announcement earlier tonight, on what we want the WDA to do, in being even more ambitious outside the eastern corridors of the A55 in north Wales and the M4 in the south.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) welcomed the same announcement, although he spoilt his welcome by claiming that nothing was being done and that we did not understand the necessity of doing something. He did not listen to what my right hon. Friend said. Immediately before making that point, he reminded the House that the WDA already had a target of creating 20 per cent. of its jobs outside those two corridors. Already this year, the agency has done better than that and reached a target of 32 per cent. If we do not have any understanding of the desirability of doing even more in that area, why are we setting targets to improve and extend the existing aims? Of course, the criticism comes from the hon. Gentleman who would give us lessons in civility.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli and the hon. Member for Swansea, East were understandably concerned about what the agency had already done to the west of the corridor in the south. I remind them that, since 1983, the agency has been involved in 111 inward investment projects in west Wales, which have created or safeguarded more than 12,000 jobs. It has entered into numerous joint venture agreements with local authorities and the private sector to achieve significant regeneration in the west.

Two fine examples of the agency working with local authorities and the private sector are Swansea vale, where the joint venture aims to attract 3,500 jobs and about £160 million of direct private sector investment, and Llanelli, where construction work has begun on the town centre shopping complex, which will provide 130,000 sq ft of much-needed new retail space. I am glad that the hon. Member for Swansea, East acknowledged that the agency has recently completed demolition and clearance work on the 200-acre former steelworks site at Felindre. That is a key strategic inward investment site, and the next stage will be the reclamation and infrastructure works.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly appeared to criticise the suspension of Standing Order No. 56. I want, through him, to—

Mr. Ron Davies: No. 86.

Mr. Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman. It went through on the nod on Friday afternoon, and I thought that I needed, through him, to thank the Opposition for their ready agreement to proceed in that way. He peculiarly claimed that this form of legislation meant that a Welsh Assembly would be the perfect body to scrutinise it. Surely, it is a very backhanded compliment to Opposition Members to suggest that their ineffectiveness can be overcome only by a toothless talking shop filled by those who failed to enter this House. What does that say about Labour Back Benchers?

The hon. Member for Caerphilly could not answer when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State understandably asked whether he would give the agency extra funds. The hon. Gentleman went on at length and identified what he called a £30 million shortfall, but could not follow through the logic of his own argument, a point not lost on his hon. Friends, most obviously the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

My right hon. Friend has already confirmed that the agency still has a significant land reclamation programme in its proposals for its next business plan. It has almost 3,500 acres in the process of being reclaimed and, on current plans, some 1,850 acres will be completed in the next two years. Some concern has been expressed about projects that have been delayed, but this year the agency has already responded to some of that concern. It has increased its budget by 25 per cent., to £17.5 million, which will allow the next phases of various projects to proceed. It has been necessary to review plans and commitments, but contractual commitments are being honoured.

Support for some projects is being deferred, but none will be lost. My right hon. Friend will shortly be discussing the agency's business plan with its board. He will be keen to ensure that its commitment to the 1,850 acres will be retained, although the individual projects that total it are wholly a matter for the agency.

I acknowledge what the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney said about Trelewis. I was grateful for the invitation to visit it with him in September.

I understand the depth of local feeling even better as a result of that visit. As I have already assured him, I have placed the issue before the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency.

Mr. Rowlands: I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me a brief intervention. Does the target of clearing all derelict land by 2000 still stand?

Mr. Jones: I believe that the agency is confident of proceeding towards the target that it has set for land reclamation. The exact phasing and completion remain to be achieved, but I have confidence about the agency's progress.

Concern has also been expressed about progress at Coed Ely. I understand that the delay in that land reclamation scheme is not solely financial, but is primarily because of problems with the contractors and the complex nature of the project. The agency will do what it can to take the project forward as soon as possible.

In the strategic guidance for the current financial year, we have clearly set out our policies for the agency, for it to continue concentrating on the creation and safeguarding of jobs through inward investment and company development. We also attach priority to land reclamation. I fully support the emphasis that continues to be given to those programmes for the coming year, which are fundamental to the continuing success of the Welsh economy. We have also set the agency a number of key strategic targets. I am pleased that it met most of its targets in 1995–96 and even exceeded some of them. I look forward to another excellent set of results in 1996–97.

The agency's aim is to

"help create a successful and dynamic economy—promoting the best business climate in Europe by assisting the growth of quality jobs and competitive industry for the benefit of people throughout Wales."

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned earlier, in line with that, the agency's programme over the next few years will focus on all parts of Wales, promoting indigenous business growth throughout Wales and creating the right climate for all the growing firms.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy, I noticed the article in *The Western Mail* this morning. I felt that it was a travesty until I heard my right hon. Friend suggest that there might be another hand in its authorship—perhaps that of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West. Is an article entitled "Why the WDA needs to be reformed" what we should expect from someone who sincerely hopes to be representing Wales in the Cabinet by May? He refers to our failing economy, calling it stagnant at best and a disgrace at worst. He tries in every way to present Wales in the worst possible light, blithely ignoring the reality. Since the general election four years ago, unemployment in Wales has fallen by more than 30 per cent.—a drop of 40,700, to the current figure of 93,000. At the same time, employment is rising.

Going back a little further, we see that, over the past 10 years, manufacturing has increased by 7.1 per cent. In the rest of the United Kingdom, it has, I am afraid to say, fallen by 26 per cent. Over the same 10-year period, construction has increased by 10 per cent. in Wales—more than three times better than the figures for Britain as a whole.

Mr. Richards: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jones: No. I am sorry, but I do not have the time to give way any more.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly ignores LG and the realities of its inward investment to the Cardiff and Newport area. In his blithe ignorance of what is going on, he does a cruel injustice to Wales. What of everybody who is working so hard in team Wales? They are faced with his alternative of wanting to centralise. He did not make it clear what he would do, but there were references again to the super-quango, bringing together the DBRW, the industry department, the Land Authority for Wales and the local enterprise agencies. The hon. Gentleman is an anti-devolutionist at heart. He would centralise and create a lumbering carthorse again, taking the WDA further back than it was when the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon set it up.

There is another Welshman who had the right words to describe the Opposition Front Bench—the former right hon. Member for Islwyn, Mr. Kinnock. His comment is the comment of all of us: Wales deserves better than the Labour party.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

WELSH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL
[*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Welsh Development Agency Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) any increase in the sums payable out of money provided by Parliament or out of the National Loans Fund or charged on and issued out of the Consolidated Fund; and

(b) any increase in the sums payable into either of those Funds,

which is attributable to provisions of the Act increasing to £1,350 million, with power to increase further by order, the limit in section 18(3) of the Welsh Development Agency Act 1975. —[*Mr. Anthony Coombs.*]

Question agreed to.

Multiple Sclerosis

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

9.59 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me a second opportunity to raise an issue that is of great importance to all who are interested in the treatment of multiple sclerosis—those who suffer from it, and those who do not.

I want to highlight two main issues. First, there is great inequality throughout the United Kingdom in access to treatment; secondly, there is a lack of understanding of the special needs of those with the disease among some NHS purchasers and providers. Many of the surrounding questions were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) in his debate on neurological disorders on 29 January.

For too long, multiple sclerosis has been regarded as a Cinderella condition. The disease was first identified in the 1860s—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Anthony Coombs.*]

Mr. Prentice: I did not fully understand that procedure, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Let me inform the hon. Gentleman and the House that it was not quite 10 pm when the debate began, and the motion for the Adjournment therefore had to be moved again at 10 pm. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly in order.

Mr. Prentice: I know exactly where I left off, Madam Speaker.

The disease was first identified in the 1860s by a French doctor. Until recently, it was regarded as untreatable, and no thought was given to how those suffering from it could be helped, advised and supported as its course progressed. I say "progressed", for, although the disease is at present incurable, many people are affected only marginally, if at all.

A quarter of those diagnosed as having MS are affected only mildly 15 years after the onset of the disease—they may have pins and needles in their fingers or toes—while a further quarter, tragically, end up in wheelchairs. The remaining 50 per cent. have the varied symptoms that characterise MS, which can include impaired co-ordination, problems with vision, loss of sensation and fatigue. One recently diagnosed constituent of mine told me that her arm sometimes felt as if it were full of molten metal. One in 15 people with MS will eventually become severely disabled.

MS typically affects more women than men, in the ratio 3:2, and strikes the young. That is what interested me in the condition in the first place. It hits people in the prime of life, often between the ages of 20 and 40. They have everything to look forward to; then comes the diagnosis that can change everything.

MS is common—it affects roughly one in every 1,000 people—but what causes it is still a mystery. No one knows why there are MS "clusters" in certain parts of the country, or why it increases according to latitude. It affects 99 people in every 100,000 in the south of England, but 178 per 100,000 in north-east Scotland. It used to be thought of as a disease that affected only Caucasians—and, curiously, non-white people who have settled here do not increase their chance of getting it, but their children acquire the risk faced by the general population. Many aspects of the disease are observed, but not understood.

Nevertheless, all is not gloom and despair. Things changed dramatically recently with the advent of new drugs that, it was claimed, would alter the course of the disease for those with relapsing-remitting MS, in which a person is free of the symptoms for a while but they often return with a vengeance. Peter Cardy, chief executive of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, wrote only a few months ago, in an article published in *The House Magazine*:

"For those who suffer severe relapses, the experience is like being dragged repeatedly to the jaws of death; blind, in pain and paralysed."

Therefore, it is not surprising that the prospect of a drug that would deal with those dreadful symptoms has excited such interest.

Beta interferon helps people with remitting and relapsing MS—about 45 per cent. of the total number. The drug was given a product licence in December 1995, allowing it to be used not just in the UK, but throughout the European Union. In November 1995, the Department of Health issued guidelines on how it should be prescribed. I have read those guidelines cover to cover, and they put the frighteners on purchasers and on the consultant neurologist to whom would fall the clinical decision of whether beta interferon should be prescribed. The result of all that has been an enormous difference throughout the UK in the drug's availability.

The NHS guidance did not state categorically that all patients judged likely to benefit from the drug must receive it; the advice was much more circumspect. Providers—hospitals and so on—were asked to think about the resource implications of using beta interferon. It is expensive—£10,000 per patient per year—but we must set that against the annual cost to the economy of MS, which is about £1.2 billion in terms of lost taxes, increased benefits and so on.

Hospitals were told

"to consider workload and manpower implications for hospital neurologists and out patient departments."

The guidance asks providers to consider the impact of providing the drug on waiting times, on consultant availability, on magnetic resonance imaging scans, on nursing and other support and, finally, on the hospital drugs budget. Couched in such a stern way, that advice clearly had an effect. In some parts of the UK, there was no access at all to beta interferon. On 10 December, I asked the Minister about the availability of beta interferon, and was told that that information was not collected centrally.

A survey was conducted by the manufacturer of the drug, Schering Pharmaceutical. It has a clear and obvious interest, but the figures it has provided to me are not necessarily tainted for that reason. The data relate to the period up to and including October 1996, almost a year after the initial guidance was issued, and just about the time that the latest and more positive advice went out from Dr. Winyard, medical director at the NHS executive.

The figures show the number of remitting-relapsing MS patients in each region and the percentage of purchasers—the health authorities—funding beta interferon in each region. In my constituency in the north-west, all health authorities make provision for beta interferon, which is good. Of course, there is a second hurdle. The consultant neurologist has to decide whether to prescribe it, but the health authorities have made a decision whether to provide the money to purchase beta interferon, so someone in Manchester with relapsing or remitting MS would be all right, but someone in Edinburgh or in Dundee would not. In Scotland, only 35 per cent. of health authorities make provision; in Wales, only 5 per cent. do so; and in the English regions, only 5 per cent. do so in the northern and Yorkshire region.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I am grateful for the opportunity to intervene. My hon. Friend refers to North Yorkshire, but may I refer him to West Yorkshire, where I have constituents who need beta interferon?

Wakefield health authority is in financial difficulties, so, although the drug is prescribed for patients, because resources are not there, my constituents cannot receive that treatment. That is diabolical. People are suffering because of the lack of resources. I therefore ask my hon. Friend to include West Yorkshire in his diagnosis of the lack of resources in various regions.

Mr. Prentice: The Minister heard those remarks and will reply in due course. If I run through the English regions, I can put it all in perspective.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): My hon. Friend said that the incidence of prescription among authorities in Wales was only 5 per cent. What does he mean by that?

Mr. Prentice: It is the percentage of health authorities that make a decision to allocate in their budgets for the purchase of beta interferon. Only 5 per cent. of the health authorities in Wales have done so.

The figures for England are: 5 per cent. in the Northern and Yorkshire region, with 14 health authorities; 10 per cent. in Trent; 50 per cent. in the South and West area; 56 per cent. in the Anglia and Oxford region; 80 per cent. in the North Thames area; and 92 per cent. in the South Thames region. Someone is okay if they live in Northern Ireland, because the figure there is 100 per cent., but those in the West Midlands area are in dire straits, because not a single health authority in that region has decided to purchase beta interferon.

A letter from the chief executive of the MS Society, dated 6 January, to my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) says:

> "A year after the licensing of the product (Beta Interferon 1 B) there are still very few MS patients who are receiving the drug in the West Midlands. There seems to be a gap between policy and practice here".

There is indeed a yawning gap. As of the middle of last year, only 160 patients nationally were being prescribed beta interferon.

Mr. Cardy said in his article in *The House Magazine*:

> "It is frankly scandalous that whether you are treated for MS depends on where you live."

That must be true.

Clearly, we do not want to go through this performance each time a new drug for MS is licensed. Other drugs are coming along which are available elsewhere, but not here in the United Kingdom. The licensing procedure should guarantee the effectiveness and the efficacy of the drug in question. In the case of beta interferon, that seems to be beyond doubt. It stretches the time between relapses by up to one third, and that is what people with MS care about. It does not necessarily stop the progress of the disease towards disability, but it does influence relapses.

Dr. Winyard wrote in the letter that was circulated to health authorities in October that no date had been set for the national trial, and I would like the Minister to comment on that. Why has a national trial to assess the impact of the drug on disability been pigeonholed? That is not good enough.

There are one or two other issues that I want to highlight in the time available to me. For example, there are not enough neurologists in the country. In a debate a few weeks ago instigated by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon, the Under-Secretary said that there are 260 consultant neurologists in England and Wales, and added that the number had increased by 4.3 per cent. over the past five years.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): That is 4.3 per cent. in each year.

Mr. Prentice: That is magnificent news, but clearly it is not enough.

When I intervened in that debate, I referred the Minister to a study produced by the Preston NHS trust, which has a neurology unit. The document, which is hot off the press, states that, if one is unfortunate enough to live in Lancaster, it can take six months to get an appointment or a referral to a neurologist. That needs to be seriously addressed. Waiting lists at clinics are simply far too long, as the maximum time—the MS Society tells me—should be one month. I think that that is reasonable, and the Minister should comment on the fact that it has been overshot so massively.

The second key area concerns the interface between the NHS and social services and the other support systems. That issue was also covered in the debate in January on neurological conditions.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society has drawn up a draft standard of care for purchasers and providers treating people with MS. It recommends how the illness should be handled at each stage of development, from the initial diagnosis, through the moderate disability stage, to the severe disability stage, for cases that tragically progress that far. The society's suggestion is already followed for other conditions for which standards of care are prescriptive. There is a standard of care if a person is suffering from diabetes, asthma, haemophilia or eczema, but not for MS or other neurological conditions.

It is an absolute disgrace that the Government have been so reluctant to fund properly research into multiple sclerosis. The Multiple Sclerosis Society has spent £30 million since it was set up in the 1950s on research into the disease. It is currently spending £8 million to fund 50 research projects. What have the Government allocated? Last year, they spent £216,000, the year before £207,000, and in 1993–94 £154,000. Those are sizeable

[Mr. Prentice]

sums of money, but they pale into insignificance when one considers the money spent by the society—a charity. The society says that it faces demands on its resources, and that it cannot be expected to carry the burden alone. It is looking for the Government to take a larger share.

I mentioned that other drugs are in the pipeline, including co-polymer 1, which was trialled in United States in 199[illegible]. It has had encouraging results. Another is cannabis. Every time I mention cannabis, my local press go berserk, as if I am being soft on drugs. However, masses of anecdotal evidence from people who suffer from MS suggests that cannabis helps them.

It was, of course, legal for cannabis to be prescribed by medically qualified doctors before the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and it was prescribed in tincture form. Under section 7 of the Act, it is now unlawful for a doctor to prescribe cannabis, yet heroin can be prescribed and is used in hospitals all the time for the relief of pain. I have also found out from the Minister for Health that an active ingredient derived from cannabis—dronabinol—has recently been rescheduled and can now be used, because it has been discovered that it could treat nausea in patients undergoing chemotherapy treatment for cancer.

I welcome the initiative that the Government have taken. I know that the Minister for Health has met the Multiple Sclerosis Society and is sympathetic, but more needs to be done. It need not cost a fortune to make services for people with MS seamless across the NHS and into the community. Wherever people live in the United Kingdom, they should have equal access to the treatment they need when they need it. At present, we have a national lottery, with too many losers.

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): I should like to thank the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) for raising this important topic. As he said, multiple sclerosis is a complex and distressing condition, which is estimated to affect more than 80,000 people in the UK, often starting in early adulthood. It places a major burden on health and social services, and, most significantly, on the individuals who suffer from it and their carers, who play such a vital role in looking after family members or friends who, sadly, are afflicted with this condition.

My ministerial colleagues and I are committed to doing all we can to help the health service alleviate the symptoms of people with multiple sclerosis, so that they can get on with their lives, because unfortunately there is as yet no cure. That is why the Government are funding—through the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health—research designed to investigate the causes of multiple sclerosis and the effectiveness of new treatments, as well as research in the two broader areas of auto-immune diseases and diseases of the central nervous system, which both underpin MS research.

With respect, the hon. Gentleman was a little churlish when he talked about the Government funding of research for MS and other related problems. In the past six years, Department of Health and Medical Research Council funding for MS has amounted to more than £2 million. As the hon. Gentleman may be aware, the Multiple Sclerosis Society has made an application for section 64 funding, which is being considered by the Department. I hope that it will be able to decide and make an announcement in the not too distant future. The MRC is also funding research into auto-immune diseases. We are committed to providing resources from central Government to help with that research

I applaud the work that is being done by the Multiple Sclerosis Society, both in providing information, support and advice to people with MS and their families, who need this assistance now, and in looking to the future by funding a major programme of research. Its "Manifesto for Multiple Sclerosis" highlights the critical importance of co-ordinated care and of planning services to enable funding to be used more effectively, and that is a message that I wholeheartedly support. It is relevant to all NHS services, not just to those for people with MS, and it is at the heart of the purpose of the NHS:

"To secure through the resources available the greatest possible improvement in the physical and mental health of the people of England."

We are gradually witnessing the emergence of new therapies for multiple sclerosis. In the past year or so, there has been particular interest in the development of the group of drugs known as beta interferons, as the hon. Gentleman said.

So far, only one beta interferon drug—a beta interferon 1b drug known as Betaferon—has been licensed for prescription in the United Kingdom. This drug received a European marketing authorisation in December 1995 and is licensed for use by certain people who suffer from the relapsing-remitting form of multiple sclerosis.

The drug is not a cure. It is not suitable for all those with MS. So far, our experience of it has been limited. However, it has been described as a "promising newcomer", and, in line with the Government's commitment to ensuring that patients receive treatments that doctors judge to be clinically necessary, it has been available under the NHS since it was licensed.

Mr. William O'Brien *rose—*

Mr. Burns: I am sorry, I do not have the time to give way.

In 1995, following requests by a number of bodies that information about beta interferon would be helpful, the NHS executive issued circular EL(95)97 and clinical advice from the Standing Medical Advisory Committee to help the NHS plan for and manage the introduction of this new treatment. The guidance—a central framework to help the NHS reach decisions at local level—was developed with a number of key bodies, including the Association of British Neurologists, general practitioner representative bodies and the Multiple Sclerosis Society.

Briefly, the guidance suggested that, because of clinical considerations—that is, because beta interferon 1b was a new treatment—to ensure that it was targeted at those people who were most likely to benefit from it and to help monitor and evaluate its effectiveness, the treatment should be prescribed only by hospital neurologists where it was judged to be clinically appropriate, and within local agreements between health authorities and hospitals.

Arrangements are in place for assessing patients and, where appropriate, prescribing treatment. More than 300 patients in England are receiving beta interferon

1b through hospitals. That includes approximately 30 patients in East Lancashire health authority, which covers the constituency of the hon. Member for Pendle.

I am not aware of any health authority which is refusing to purchase or prescribe beta interferon. However, as with any procedure—but particularly when the procedure is new and still relatively untested—there is no single view within the NHS about the precise circumstances in which the treatment should be available. Consequently, prescribing across the country will not necessarily follow a uniform pattern. That is consistent with the arrangements for setting priorities and reaching decisions within the NHS.

It has been suggested that the Government should spell out at a national level precisely what treatments the NHS should provide. We do not think that that would be right. No list of treatments could ever hope to accommodate the range and complexity of the different cases that individual clinicians face all the time. Such a course would be too inflexible to take account of the different needs of individual patients, and would prevent clinicians and managers from carrying out different alternative approaches that could be of benefit to patients.

The Government have, however, made it clear that health authorities should not, as a matter of principle, decide not to use any clinically effective treatment. Even when the effectiveness of a procedure is not in general judged to be high, it might be both effective and appropriate in certain circumstances for an individual patient. That message was repeated in our recent White Paper, "The National Health Service—a Service with Ambitions".

I shall deal briefly with the point about the therapeutic use of cannabis. I shall write to the hon. Member for Pendle in the next few days about the issues with which I am unable to deal because of the time. My ministerial colleagues and I are aware of, and concerned about, the distress experienced by people suffering from multiple sclerosis, and we have carefully considered the representations made to us that cannabis should be made available for medicinal use.

The therapeutic use of cannabis is a complex issue, and it may be helpful if I address some of the most important considerations. Under section 7 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, cannabis and certain other drugs are controlled, because it is in the public interest for their production, supply and possession to be either wholly unlawful, or unlawful except for the purpose of research or other special purposes; or for it to be unlawful for doctors to supply them except under licence from the Home Office. The controls imposed by the Act conform with the international restrictions covering those drugs.

We are committed to ensuring that patients receive the drugs they need to treat their clinical conditions. Before a cannabis-based medicine could be prescribed, a company seeking a licence would have to present the supporting data—which would have to demonstrate the medicine's safety, efficacy and quality—to the Medicines Control Agency, in the normal way. The MCA would then evaluate it, and, if it were able to approve it, notify the Home Office.

We understand the desire of people with multiple sclerosis to explore every avenue to seek relief. It would, however, not benefit those people if we were to disregard the procedures that have been set up to ensure the safety, efficacy and quality of prescribed drugs. We have to take account of all the considerations, including the potential risks associated with short and long-term use of cannabis, and consider whether any benefits—which must have been proven scientifically—outweigh those risks. We already know that there are side effects from the use of cannabis.

We have received a wealth of anecdotal evidence of the efficacy of cannabis in treating some of the symptoms of multiple sclerosis. A matter as important as people's health, however, should not be taken lightly, and hard, scientific, research-based evidence is required. The conclusions of available research are not very convincing, due to the limited scope of the projects, the use of small cohort groups, or the lack of suitable scientific methodology.

I understand that the Multiple Sclerosis Society has taken positive steps to encourage trials, by offering support to researchers. The main agency through which the Government sponsor medical research is, of course, the Medical Research Council, which is always willing to consider scientifically sound proposals.

Current legislation does not prevent research into the medicinal use of cannabis, provided that a Home Office licence has been obtained for that purpose. For the purposes of a clinical trial, which involves sale or supply of medicinal products and various other specified activities, a clinical trial certificate or clinical trial certificate exemption would also have to be obtained from the Medicines Control Agency.

We are therefore not in a position to allow the therapeutic use of cannabis. It is up to researchers and companies wishing to market a cannabis-based product to supply the necessary scientific evidence of its therapeutic value, if any, in the first instance. They would also have to consider the form in which cannabis could be made available for use as a medicinal product in a controlled dose. As long as we have no evidence, on the grounds that I have just outlined, it is not possible to allow the therapeutic use of cannabis.

Once again, I thank the hon. Member for Pendle. I appreciate, as he will know, that I have not dealt with every issue because of the shortness of time.

Mr. William O'Brien: Hear, hear.

Mr. Burns: There is no point in the hon. Gentleman saying, "Hear, hear," because it is not his debate; I was concentrating on the speech of the hon. Member for Pendle, because I appreciate the sincerity of his concerns about those who suffer from MS. The Government are equally concerned, and we are all determined to do all we can to alleviate the suffering that they sadly have to go through.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Tuesday 18 February.

LEVER PARK BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 18 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Defence Contracts

2. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors he takes into account when awarding major defence contracts. [13714]

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. James Arbuthnot): My Department takes account of all relevant factors before awarding contracts, including financial, operational and industrial factors. Our aim is to secure best value for money in the long term.

Mrs. Campbell: Does the award of the Royal Air Force TriStar maintenance contract, which went to a firm in the United Arab Emirates, result from the defence co-operation accord that the Secretary of State signed with the United Arab Emirates last year?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It did not.

Sir Anthony Grant: Although I am bitterly disappointed that the main contract went abroad, does my hon. Friend agree that it does no good to the work force of an excellent company such as Marshall, or anybody else, to spread doom and gloom? Is there, even at this stage, a hope that there may still be some chance of Marshall playing a part in the main contract?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the way in which he has approached the matter, which is in contrast to the approach of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). Marshall is a very good company and I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that it has been named as a subcontractor to GAMCO in the TriStar maintenance contract.

Mr. Hutton: Does the Minister consider it an important part of the Government's procurement policy to ensure the retention of an industrial capability to design and construct nuclear-powered submarines in this country? If he does, will he explain how he thinks their policy is being helped or hindered by the three-year delay in placing an order for the replacement of Trafalgar class submarines?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is of course necessary to negotiate the best possible price for the taxpayer for the batch 2 Trafalgar submarines, but I draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention the fact that, if it were not for a Conservative Government, we would not have any Trident submarines at all—and we certainly would not have the fourth Trident submarine that we have already ordered.

Sir John Cope: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government remain fully committed to the Eurofighter and its weapons systems? We know that Labour's defence review would lead to cuts—probably—in both the Eurofighter and its weapons systems, with disastrous consequences for British industry and jobs.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend is right. It is breathtaking that the Labour party appears to promise both stability and change in the same breath. It tries to be all things to all men. Unless it is able to say that it will exempt the Eurofighter from its pretended strategic review, we cannot be sure that the Eurofighter would not go the same way as the TSR2.

Nuclear Weapons

3. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in the United States about the cost, relevance and morality of nuclear weapons. [13715]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Michael Portillo): Nuclear weapons have successfully deterred war in Europe for more than 50 years. That is their financial and moral justification.

Mr. Mullin: Did the Secretary of State see the recent remarks by General Lee Butler, the former chief of US Strategic Command, who said that nuclear weapons were inherently dangerous, hugely expensive, militarily inefficient and morally indefensible? Did the Secretary of State also see the remarks of Sir Michael Atiyah, the former President of the Royal Society, who, in his farewell address 14 months ago, said that nuclear weapons were fundamentally misguided, a total waste of resources and a significant factor in our relative economic decline?

Does the Secretary of State think that history will show that those who were so keen on nuclear weapons will turn out to be the extremists and those of us who were against them may turn out to be the moderates?

Mr. Portillo: I do not agree with the two interesting quotations that the hon. Gentleman just made, but if his

point is that many people agree with him, he is, of course, right; he speaks for the majority of the Labour party. At one time, 19 members of the present Labour Front Bench agreed with him. At one time, the Leader of the Opposition was a member of national CND. At one time, the Labour party spokesman on defence was a member of parliamentary CND. I perfectly understand that the hon. Gentleman feels aggrieved that he used to have all these people agreeing with him; whereas he has stuck to his opinions, these wimps have changed their minds.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is the true voice of the Labour party—a Labour party that has consistently called for defence cut after defence cut?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is not only the true voice of the Labour party, but the courageous voice of the Labour party. He has tried to say today that there are many who agree with him. He need have no fear. After the next election, I am confident that the Labour party will revert to type, win or lose.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: When the Secretary of State has the opportunity to meet the new United States Secretary of State of Defence, Mr. Cohen, will he discuss with him the significance of the remarks recently attributed to the Russian Defence Minister: that the Russian nuclear arsenal has become unmanageable and that there appears to be a loss of effective command and control? In those circumstances, is there not a need for a joint initiative on the part of the United Kingdom and the United States to endeavour to prevent rogue nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists?

Mr. Portillo: That is a matter of great concern and interest to the international community. I am pleased to say that there has been the most intimate co-operation between the United Kingdom, the United States, the Russian Federation and others. I am frequently in touch with my Russian opposite number. Indeed, I have been in touch with him very recently. He has not raised with me any immediate concerns, but he knows that the international community is willing to do what it can to ensure that there is not proliferation in the very dangerous manner that the hon. and learned Gentleman just mentioned.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we cannot disinvent nuclear weapons, and that the real danger with the proliferation of surface-to-surface missiles is the fact that they can fall into the hands of very unstable regimes that are able to target most of Europe?

Mr. Portillo: There are all sorts of new dangers in the new world that we now face. Nuclear deterrents will remain cost-effective and morally justified because they can avert nuclear or other war disaster. That is why I am so confident about the opinion that we have always held, and why, because it is common sense, we understand why 19 members of the Labour Front Bench have had to change what they say to come into line with common sense. Whether they have changed their minds is a matter that only they and God can know.

Mr. Llew Smith: Will the Minister tell the House what are the total lifetime operational refit and decommissioning costs of Trident, on top of the £12 billion that taxpayers have already provided for its construction?

Mr. Portillo: When the hon. Gentleman tackles the cost of nuclear weapons, he is on the very weakest part of the argument. I believe that the total cost of the nuclear programme will be about 2.5 per cent. of the defence budget over the life of the nuclear deterrent. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has confirmed my view that the opinions expressed in the main question are widespread in the Labour party, even today. I congratulate him, at least, on sticking to his convictions and opinions. Where are the other brave men and women who will rise and say that they have not changed their minds either?

Eurofighter

4. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made on the development of Eurofighter. [13716]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We announced last September that we were ready to proceed to the production, production investment and support phases of the programme on a four-nation basis, and we very much hope that the other nations will soon be able to commit to those phases of the project.

Mr. Evans: Does my hon. Friend agree that the European fighter aircraft is important to my constituency and to neighbouring constituencies, where thousands of workers are committed to the project, and that it will ensure that our young pilots in the Royal Air Force have the best aircraft possible into the next century?

Does my hon. Friend further agree that those who work on the project will have been surprised that, during last Thursday's debate on the RAF, when the Opposition had several opportunities to say that the project would not be part of any review that they would undertake if they formed the next Government, they did not do so? People remember the cancellation of the TSR2 project, which cost hundreds of jobs in the Preston area. Is this not a case of new Labour, but same old danger?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is completely right. The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) let the cat out of the bag in October when he said that a Labour defence review would have "painful consequences". We cannot assess what those consequences would be unless the Labour party is prepared to say that a project such as Eurofighter, which is vital to our defence and to our industrial capability, would be exempted from the review. My hon. Friend is right to mention the TSR2 debacle. Lancashire still remembers that Harold Wilson promised that the TSR2 jobs would be safe, and that, within a few months, they were axed.

Mr. Spellar: Well, Madam Speaker, they are certainly at it again, are they not? In the past two Question Times and, as the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) said, in the debate on the Royal Air Force, Conservative Members raised the question of Eurofighter and got absolutely clear answers. We expressed our support for the project, but still they play silly political games. Do they not understand the consequences of those antics,

when Germany has not yet signed the production contract? Raising such uncertainty can only give ammunition to those in Germany who do not want to order the Eurofighter. When will they start to back the aircraft, which the RAF wants, British industry and British workers?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I suspect, Madam Speaker, that I am not allowed to accuse the hon. Gentleman of breathtaking hypocrisy, so I shall not do it. I shall merely say that this Conservative Government are committed to the Eurofighter. The hon. Gentleman has refused time and again—he has done it again today—to say that it would not form part of a Labour defence review.

Mr. Dover: When does my hon. Friend think that the Eurofighter will be ready for service?

Mr. Arbuthnot: We expect to take possession of our first Eurofighter in 2001, as does Germany. Spain and Italy expect to take possession of their first Eurofighters the following year.

Royal Navy (Recruitment)

5. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on future recruitment to the Royal Navy. [13718]

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): The recruitment target for the Royal Navy in 1996-97 is some 4,500 people. We expect to achieve 90 per cent. of that target.

Mr. Miller: The Minister will acknowledge my interest in the issue of gapping in the fleet. How important is the role of the Royal Navy Sea Cadets in meeting his targets in the long term? How does he expect training ship Forward in my constituency to obtain the resources that it needs for a new building when his colleagues in the Tory-controlled county council and the relevant Departments are failing to provide them in the youth budget? If he is serious about the role of the Sea Cadets, is it not time that he had serious discussions with his colleagues to get the equation right?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking about sea cadets in his constituency. I do not know the exact details, but I would be happy to look into the matter if he would do me the courtesy of writing to me about it. Some sea cadets inevitably go on to the Royal Navy. They are very welcome; we need all the sea cadets we can get. The Opposition fundamentally misunderstand the true nature of the problem. There is a huge demographic hole in Britain. There are one third fewer 17 and 18-year-olds than there were even only 15 years ago. The number of people aged 16 to 24 fell by a sixth in the same period. More young people than ever go into further and higher education. That has greatly reduced our recruiting pool. I am happy to confirm that the more sea cadets go into the Navy the better, but we do not regard the cadets as a major source of recruits, rather as a valuable part of the source.

Mr. Robathan: Has my hon. Friend seen the comments to a Senate committee of General Reimer, the US Army chief of staff, because they relate to the use of women in Royal Navy ships? Will he consider them and, in the light of some high-profile tribunal and court cases involving the Royal Navy, study again the policy that has led to women serving on Royal Navy ships and the disruption that it has regrettably caused?

Mr. Soames: I shall certainly study the remarks to which my hon. Friend has drawn my attention, but it is unlikely that they would deflect us from existing policy. I do not agree with the point that he is getting at. Women in the Royal Navy make an invaluable contribution. I regret it when matters go badly wrong, as they clearly did, but we would not be without them; they are marvellous people.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister agree that the Navy's recruitment target is down by almost 12 per cent? Having made thousands of service men and women redundant, he has had to open recruitment offices that he previously closed. Does he not understand that the country will judge the so-called manpower policy as mismanaged, mishandled and mistaken, especially when he has the cheek to accuse Labour of wanting to make defence cuts after his Government have reduced our Navy to its smallest size since Trafalgar?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on every count. Royal Navy recruiting targets have not fallen but doubled. We hope this year to recruit at least 90 per cent. of the target. The Opposition have constantly used redundancies to attack the Government. They are wrong. The redundancies that followed "Options for Change" and the defence cost studies, however regrettable, were inevitable, because the services are a young man's and young woman's business. The redundancies were essentially among older service men and women. The Army alone needs 15,000 young recruits a year. We have a great deal to do and are working hard at it. The hon. Gentleman's thoroughly irresponsible attack on service recruiting does nothing but damage to the image of the armed forces in the eyes of the public.

Defence Spending

6. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the effect on maintenance of existing military equipment of reducing United Kingdom defence spending to the European average. [13719]

Mr. Portillo: A reduction in UK defence expenditure to the current NATO European average would involve cuts of around £5,000 million a year. That would have a devastating effect on the capability of our armed forces.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Would not such an action—which has been endorsed by Labour conference after Labour conference—reduce employment in places such as Sheffield and the defence capability of this country? The bleatings from Opposition Members show that that is Labour's intended defence policy, which must be deplored.

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have been treated this afternoon to a display by old Labour, and we have seen the old danger lurking within the Labour party. *[Interruption.]* One Labour Member after another has risen to make his case, and some of those who are now jeering agree with those hon. Members. We know that Labour wishes to cut our defences and that many Labour Members would like to reduce our armed forces to the armed wing of Oxfam. We must not let those policies into this country. Labour cannot be trusted on defence.

Dr. Reid: I do not know about old Labour, but it is nice to hear the old pacifist—the old conscientious objector. He is the first in history to become Defence Secretary while forgetting his past. He stands there posing as the Braveheart of the defence budget, but the truth is that he has cut the budget by 31 per cent. in real terms—the RAF by 31 per cent. and the Navy by 38 per cent. The louder he roars, the more he proves his own inadequacy, and his incapacity to defend this country's defence budget.

Mr. Portillo: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is interested in the truth, but let me tell him once and for all that I have never been a pacifist or a conscientious objector. He entirely misses the point. European countries have in general reduced their defence spending, but Britain remains towards the top of the European average. His party wants to reduce our defence spending to the European average. In other words, whatever reductions may have been made, his party wants to cut defence spending further. He does not have to look far to see those—they are now looking away—who want to cut defence spending to the European average. The difference between where we are now and the European average is £5,000 million; he cannot wriggle off that figure.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is not my right hon. Friend absolutely right to say that our defence spending in the past 17 years has been creditable compared with that of many of our European counterparts? Should there not be an increase in defence spending in other European countries to help provide a stable Europe in the future?

Mr. Portillo: Any talk about a greater European security and defence identity must be based on European capabilities. Levels of defence spending across Europe today are appreciably lower than they were, and that is why I have no aspiration to descend to the European average. That is why we must resist any party—or any party that is full of members—dedicated to reducing spending to the European average. That party is the Labour party, and that is why we cannot trust it.

Belize

7. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what expenditure his Department forecasts will be spent on assistance to the Government of Belize in the current year; and what was the figure in 1992–93. [13720]

Mr. Soames: Since the withdrawal of the garrison in 1994, we have continued to provide Belize with a vide range of military assistance, including training courses in the UK and the provision of loan service personnel. Details are confidential between Governments.

Mr. Gunnell: The withdrawal of troops has had a massive effect on the economy of Belize. Is the Minister satisfied that that has not made the country more vulnerable to incursions from Guatemala? I welcome the fact that training takes place—particularly of Territorials—in Belize, but will he ensure that the troops do not use the local fauna, many of which are endangered, for target practice?

Mr. Soames: The services never abuse local fauna; we are against abusing local fauna—*[Laughter.]* Oh yes, we are—almost all local fauna anyway, and some flora. I am happy to confirm that Belize is an extraordinarily important training area for us. At this moment, 280 members of three London-based Territorial Army units, 10 Para, 4 Royal Greenjackets and the Honourable Artillery Company are in Belize to carry out jungle training, and 2 Para are currently undertaking parachute training there.

The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that relations with Guatemala are much improved, and I take his point that the withdrawal of the garrison would have had, in some way, a momentarily unhappy effect on the economy. However, that has certainly been put right, and we enjoy the most excellent relations with Belize. The Prime Minister of Belize, Mr. Manuel Esquivel, came to London last November, and the leader of the opposition, Mr. Said Musa, came in September. The Overseas Development Administration continues to run a substantial aid programme in Belize of around £4 million a year.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Having served for a short time in Her Majesty's services, may I state my belief—with which I hope my hon. Friend agrees—that it is vital that we maintain defence spending on assisting such countries as Belize? Is not that one of the reasons why we spend towards the top of the average of European countries on defence—our interests lie in all four corners of the world and not only within Europe?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Britain retains its supremely effective, efficient and well-equipped armed forces for precisely the reason he gave. Belize is one of the few remaining areas of the world where we are able to undertake jungle training, and it is extremely important for that reason. I am glad to confirm that my right hon. and hon. Friends and everyone connected with defence are determined to maintain the British pre-eminence in skill at arms, which is admired throughout the world. Our people, as my hon. Friend knows, are the benchmark by which all other armed forces are judged.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is it not true not only that Belize offers cheap training facilities, but that it has always welcomed the involvement of British forces and the contribution of several aircraft on station to protect against drug runners going to Belize and those countries that are likely to be the unfortunate recipients of drugs?

We all welcome the statement that Belize will continue to have our support, but will that be constant and of sufficient strength to support the country in the way that is needed?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Lady is right. Indeed, the West Indies guard ship visits Belize at least once a year, almost always to participate in anti-drugs operations with Belize forces. Similarly, the Army Air Corps flight also liaises and works with the Government of Belize. It would be almost impossible for us to have a better or closer relationship with the people of Belize, and they attach the greatest importance to the presence of our troops there on training.

Royal Air Force (Equipment Budget)

9. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the RAF's equipment budget for the next four years. [13723]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We plan to increase spending on major equipment procurement for all three services by more than 15 per cent. in real terms over the next four years. The RAF will be a major beneficiary, as demonstrated by recent orders for Nimrod 2000 maritime patrol aircraft, Storm Shadow cruise missiles and Brimstone anti-armour weapons.

Mr. Brazier: Does my hon. Friend agree that the most important single requirement for a conventional war fighting capability is a modern air force, and that the bulk of the welcome forward programme for the RAF is based around Eurofighter and weapons to be carried by Eurofighter? Does he also agree that, should any Government be sufficiently irresponsible as to conduct a defence review driven by peacetime foreign policy requirements, the effect could only be an undermining of that modern war fighting capability that is so important in a dangerous world and a replacement that would look very much like the khaki branch of Oxfam?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right. We have already had exchanges today about Eurofighter and the fact that the Opposition refuse to exempt Eurofighter from their strategic review, but we have not yet had exchanges about whether Nimrod 2000 replacement maritime patrol aircraft would be exempted from that review. Would Labour exempt the CASOM—the conventionally armed stand-off missile? Would it exempt the anti-armour weapon? We do not know—perhaps Labour Members will tell us, because without such an assurance we know that Labour cannot be trusted on defence.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the Minister still propose to go for the 40 to 50 future large aircraft? What is the status of that project in his Department? Would it not be best to keep wing technology in my constituency in Wales instead of letting it slide to Hamburg?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman is arguing very strongly for a further Conservative Government; I thank him for that.

The Government's position on the future large aircraft was set out in a written answer by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind) on 16 December 1994 at column *823*. It remains the case that we need to be satisfied that a number of conditions have been met before we agree to rejoin the FLA programme. That work has not yet been completed. We shall make an announcement as soon as a decision is taken.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the height of irresponsibility for any party to say that it will conduct a strategic defence and security review without telling the electorate before the general election exactly what the criteria of that review would be? Does he further agree that, without that information, all those orders that he has mentioned for the Royal Air Force are in jeopardy, threatening tens of thousands of jobs in Lancashire and dealing a death blow to the defence industry?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I do agree, because a defence review is the policy that dare not speak its name. That policy is the mask for cuts demanded by Labour Back Benchers. That policy is the greatest skulk of the century; Labour Members are trying desperately to pretend that they do not want to cut defence expenditure. They are trying to be all things to all men, and the electorate will see through them.

Surplus Defence Equipment Sales

10. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new proposals he has to increase receipts from the sale of surplus defence equipment. [13724]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Disposal Sales Agency continues to involve private sector companies under contract to the agency. The agency is to broaden its customer base to include disposal sales services on behalf of other Government Departments.

Mr. Flynn: Why did the Government spend £13 million on HMS Battleaxe and sell it off cheaply within 12 months? Why did they spend £25 million on HMS Andromeda and sell it within a very short time to India for £65,000? Why did they spend £155 million on HMS Renown, which has never been operational since and is about to be scrapped? Is this not financial incompetence on an olympic scale?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, it is not. We have the youngest Navy in living memory, and the sheer fighting power of our Navy is a tribute to the investment that the Government have made in the Navy in buying new ships and in ordering such things as the landing platform dock replacement craft, which we ordered last year, and ships like HMS Ocean, which will produce an incredibly powerful attacking force. We shall be able to maintain the amphibious capability because we shall be re-elected at the next general election.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a certain hypocrisy about those who demand smaller profits or no profits from the sales of defence equipment but more expenditure on social services, including those relating to unemployment and the like?

Does that not need to be properly thought through, especially by the Labour party, which seems to have no values at all?

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is difficult to say whether the Labour party has no values at all because its members present different sets of values according to whom they are talking to. They try to be all things to all men. They try to pretend that they believe in the defence of the country, when we know that they would undermine not only our armed forces, but our defence industry. Our defence industry is stronger than it has ever been. Last year, we had the best ever export results. That performance would be undermined by the Labour party: it would undermine defence exports just as it would undermine the defence industry.

Royal Air Force (Germany)

11. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where the Royal Air Force squadrons currently stationed at Laarbruch and Brüggen are to be based in the United Kingdom upon their withdrawal from Germany. [13725]

Mr. Soames: Of the squadrons that are currently located at RAF Laarbruch, No. 18 Squadron will move to RAF Odiham, and we plan that Nos. 3 and 4 Squadrons should redeploy to RAF Cottesmore. The tri-national Tornado training establishment, currently at RAF Cottesmore, will reform on 1 April 1999 at RAF Lossiemouth as the national Tornado operational conversion unit. No final decisions have yet been taken about the redeployment of the Tornado squadrons from RAF Brüggen.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend's statement is welcome. Is it not a crazy situation that the squadrons in RAF Germany face restrictions on low flying and a shortage of ranges and have to expand much time and cost in transiting to the UK and elsewhere to train? Is it not more expensive to employ local civilians in Germany than to have civilian support in the UK? The earlier the squadrons can follow headquarters back to Britain, the more jobs there will be in this country.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He rightly says that it is a prudent move, for all the reasons that he mentioned, and it is in line with the Government's continued search for increased efficiency and cost reduction in support and training. There is no doubt that, as the squadrons are presently configured in Germany, they are unable to deliver the value for money that we wish to see. I take my hon. Friend's point about the Tornado squadrons' base, and we shall take the decision as soon as possible. The changes in no way represent a diminution of the United Kingdom commitment to NATO, and the aeorplanes will remain tasked to NATO central forces.

Mr. Tony Banks: We do not need any lectures in patriotism from Ministers. When I was clutching a rifle in the Air Training Corps, the Secretary of State was clutching a handful of white feathers. If Germany feels that it can spend a lower proportion of its national wealth on defence, why cannot this country?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman's reference to my right hon. Friend is outrageous. If I may say so, it has been reported to me that the hon. Gentleman was "a shower" as a cadet and that his personal turn-out and drill were a source of grave concern to the wider youth community.

The UK spends what it does on defence because we have the best armed forces in the world and we have a major role to play beyond these shores. We do not compare ourselves with our German friends: the British forces are different, and the Tory Government will continue to give them all the support that they need.

RAF Halton

12. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of RAF Halton. [13726]

Mr. Soames: RAF Halton will continue to be the RAF centre for administrative and support trade training and to provide basic recruit and general service training for the majority of airmen.

Mr. Lidington: Will my hon. Friend congratulate all those involved in the professional transition of the functions of RAF Halton in recent years? Will he bear it in mind that the previous uncertainty about the future of the base has led to a backlog in necessary repairs and refurbishment for single quarters at Halton? Will he review his budget to see how those problems may be tackled as soon as possible?

Mr. Soames: I know that the commanding officer of RAF Halton is grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is another example of the wider youth community.

I have visited RAF Halton and seen the high standard of training that it provides. It is true that the standard of single accommodation is not as good as we would like to see it. The RAF takes its responsibilities for the welfare of its personnel seriously and I assure my hon. Friend that we shall do what we can to smarten the single quarters up.

RAF Burtonwood

13. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the private storage and distribution activities at RAF Burtonwood will cease. [13727]

Mr. Soames: The disposal of the site at Burtonwood is now in progress and awaits the resolution of the planning situation.

Mr. Hall: That does not answer my question about storage and distribution at RAF Burtonwood. Given the Minister's refusal to bring that activity to an end, may I remind him that the north-west traffic commissioner has stated on two occasions that RAF Burtonwood is totally unsuitable for storage and distribution purposes. As the previous Minister, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), promised in the House two years ago that there would be no intensification of such use of RAF Burtonwood, can the Minister tell the House why the Ministry of Defence has acquiesced in a further

application for a vehicle distribution licence for PDS International Ltd., as was reported in the press this weekend?

Mr. Soames: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has a perfect grasp of the situation. RAF Burtonwood is let for warehousing and distribution. Any request for a tenant to use it as an operating centre would require my Department's approval. No requests have been approved, and would not be agreed without prior consultation with the traffic commissioners, in line with guidance given in the Department of Transport publication entitled "Goods vehicle operating licences: a guide to operators".

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February. [13743]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Livingstone: Has the Prime Minister seen a copy of the letter of the Secretary of State for Defence to me, in which he admits that bacteriological warfare experiments took place on the civilian populations of London and the south coast between 1964 and 1977? Will he agree to establish an independent inquiry to see whether there was any harmful effect from those tests, as some doctors currently believe, and to report on why the then Secretary of State for Defence, Lord Healey, was not informed that the tests were taking place?

The Prime Minister: The direct answer is that I have not seen the hon. Gentleman's letter to my right hon. Friend. I understand that the events to which the hon. Gentleman refers took place in 1966, so either the documents would have been released under the 30-year rule, or they would not be available under the general rule that papers are not available to a successor Government.

Q2. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February. [13744]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gallie: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the importance of defence-related jobs in my Ayr constituency? Is he aware that the Nimrod 2000 programme will provide many jobs, as does the small boat maintenance and construction work at Ailsa Perth and Troon? How would those jobs stand up if we reduced our defence expenditure to the European average?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. I see no need for a further defence review, as promised by Labour. After "Front Line First", the only possible reason for a defence review would be further reductions in defence expenditure. I can see no other reason. The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has rather honestly said that a Labour review would have "painful consequences". Where those painful consequences would fall—whether on Nimrod, Eurofighter, Merlin or Phoenix—and where the job losses would be, I cannot say, but I noticed that, in the article by the leader of the Labour party in *The Daily Telegraph*, there was not a single assurance about any of those contracts.

Mr. Blair: Now that the Prime Minister has disowned the Health Secretary as his constitutional spokesman, can he tell us why he appointed him as such in the first place? Rather than rampaging through the responsibilities of other Cabinet Ministers, would it not be better if the Health Secretary addressed himself to the huge and manifest crisis in the national health service?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to talk about the role of Health Secretaries and devolution, will he tell the House whether he supports the view of the shadow Health Secretary, who said:

> "Once we have a Scottish Parliament handling health affairs in Scotland, it is not possible for me to continue as Minister of Health administering health in England"?

Is that the Leader of the Opposition's view? If so, will he make it clear to the people of Scotland, so that they may understand what his devolution proposals mean?

Mr. Blair: I have made it clear to the Prime Minister on many occasions that, if he wants to give one of his Question Times to me, I shall be delighted to accept it.

If he cannot answer that question about the health service, perhaps he will answer another one. Is it correct that this afternoon the Health Secretary will back down on the proposal to hire out general practitioners to supermarkets and drug companies? If he does so, the move will be warmly welcomed by people who do not want to see their GPs go the way of dentists, with higher and rising charges.

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman waits, he will find out what my right hon. Friend will say about primary health care. It is about a better way of delivering national health services under national health service rules in order to best meet the needs and the preferences of national health service patients. That is what has activated us to make all health reforms and what continues to activate us, as my right hon. Friend will make clear this afternoon.

Mr. Blair: If the Prime Minister is in any doubt about the state of the national health service, let him cast his eye over the "Winter Crisis Update" issued by the British Medical Association last week. It details cancelled operations, rising waiting lists and bed and nurse shortages the length and breadth of the country. Is it not true that the Health Secretary and other Ministers are more interested in fighting the next Tory leadership election than in doing their jobs properly for the country? The tragedy for the country is that the Prime Minister stands by and lets them.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has carefully manoeuvred to his prepared soundbite, but I shall answer the substance of his question. Yet again, he uses the national health service as a football without acknowledging the fact that national health service hospitals are now dealing with 10 million in-patients a year, 3.5 million day cases a year and 14 million out-patients a year—that *is 75,000 patients every single* day of the year. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that there is a crisis, I remind him that, under this Government, general and acute patient activity has increased by 80 per cent. while, under the last Labour Government, it did not increase but fell by 7 per cent.

Q3. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February. [13745]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dykes: Did my right hon. Friend notice that last week's *Times*-Dillon Anne Frank Memorial Forum was accompanied by demonstrations by neo-Nazi groups, who paraded up and down denying that the second world war holocaust took place? Allowing for natural Home Office hesitation about an effective future text but bearing in mind that other countries have such legislation, may I wish my right hon. Friend well on his visit to the Board of Deputies of British Jews tomorrow and ask him to re-examine the issue and discuss it with the Home Secretary? May I remind him that all-party legislation on the subject was successfully launched in the House recently?

The Prime Minister: I think that everyone deplores the sentiments expressed by those who deny the holocaust. It undoubtedly occurred—it is a matter of absolute historical fact—and I can understand the hurt, the offence and the distress of those who suffered or whose families suffered at that time. It might be right to introduce a specific offence, and of course I shall discuss the matter again with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

However, I am dubious about the practical effect of doing so, and I put several points to the House. First, there is a danger that the amount of holocaust denial material that is likely to stir racial hatred might increase if it were subjected to the sort of publicity that would follow such an approach. At present, that material is subject to prosecution under public order law—and rightly so. Furthermore, I understand that there is no unanimous view about the matter within the Jewish community. Before I reach a conclusive view, I would want to take account of the views of those who are most deeply concerned about the matter.

Mr. Simpson: In respect of the Government's decision on the royal yacht, does the Prime Minister agree with the former Prime Minister, the Father of the House, that the conduct of the Secretary of State for Defence was not honourable? Would it not be better for the Prime Minister to admit to Britain's probably best-known sailor that, yet again, he has been hoist by his own Portillo?

The Prime Minister: The decision on a royal yacht was not made just by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence; it was a Cabinet decision on what I regard as an important national asset that plays an important role in winning business for Britain abroad. I believe that the project is an investment in our nation's future, and that it is entirely appropriate that it should be met out of public funds. I look forward to the support that there will be when the yacht is built in a British shipyard, *sustaining British jobs.*

Q4. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February. [13746]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Devlin: Will by right hon. Friend confirm that, since 1979, average pensioner incomes have improved by 50 per cent. over and above inflation? Will he also confirm that 90 per cent. of today's pensioners reaching retirement age have an income in addition to their state pension? Does he think that that will be a comfort to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on his 65th birthday today?

The Prime Minister: I should like to wish the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) a very happy birthday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That is warmly echoed by my hon. Friends. Wrong though the hon. Gentleman has been on almost every issue during his long parliamentary career—in a minute, he is going to say that he is not 65 and I am fiddling the figures—I hope that he smiles before he is 66.

Mr. Skinner: Perhaps the Prime Minister would now deal with the real issues in Britain today. He has been in power since 1990. He has doubled the national debt, and the public sector borrowing requirement is now more than £25 billion. He is the Prime Minister who came from the belly of the banking establishment, even though he only swept the floors at Standard Chartered. He is the Prime Minister who, on Black Wednesday, 16 September 1992, along with his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who was the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, lost this country £10 billion in an afternoon—and never went near a betting shop.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is becoming quite curmudgeonly in his retirement. The fact is that we have the lowest debt ratio of any of the larger economies in Europe. It is far lower than in 1979. *[Interruption.]* "Doubled it," shout the Opposition. If we had continued their policy, it would have more than quadrupled.

Q5. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February. [13747]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Whittingdale: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that his Government are committed to the preservation of grammar schools? Is he aware that Liberal-Labour-controlled Essex county council has withdrawn free transport to such schools, thus denying

thousands of parents the opportunity to send their children to some of the finest grammar schools in the country? Does he agree that, if we want to know how Labour would behave in government, we need only look at Labour in local government?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's last remarks were undoubtedly true. He echoes a point made by the leader of the Labour party himself in the past; he also highlights another example of Lib-Lab unity in opposing parental choice.

The vindictive decision—for there is no other way to describe it—should not surprise us. Labour has opposed grant-maintained schools, testing, performance tables and grammar schools. The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) regards test results and the like as a "fanatical doctrine": I gather that she once said that. So much for the fiction that the Labour party supports either grant-maintained schools or grammar schools. My hon. Friend has highlighted what we knew already—that Labour cares little about the wishes of parents, except when they are parents themselves.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During Defence questions, I asked a question about RAF Burtonwood. The Minister of State said that no application had been made for an operator's licence at RAF Burtonwood by PDS International Ltd., but I can tell the House that the application for such a licence appeared in the "Warrington Mercury" on 6 February, and that the Ministry of Defence agents were aware of it. I therefore feel that the House has been misled.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order, as the hon. Gentleman must know. It is a point of argument. The hon. Gentleman might try tabling another question whereby he could make his point known, and have it published again in the *Official Report*.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Further to the question to the Prime Minister that was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), have you received an application for the stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)? As he has reached his 65th birthday, he will wish—as a good trade unionist—to give way to a younger and better man.

Madam Speaker: I am not sure what the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has done, but such an application does not come to me; it goes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I understand that the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) also has a birthday today. Although he may not be 65, perhaps we can have a joint pension-book party this week.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I regret that I have not had an opportunity to give you notice of my point of order, which concerns a change of policy announced by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). He told me in reply to a parliamentary question:

"It is policy, on grounds of confidentiality, for Ministers not to comment publicly on individual applications for entry clearance."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1997; Vol. 289, c. *663*.]

That is a very sudden change in policy. I have been asking such questions regularly over the past few years, and I entirely understand why Ministers wished to change the policy: the replies to my questions have often revealed a catalogue of appalling inefficiency and incompetence, particularly in high commissions and especially in the high commission in Islamabad.

Would you, Madam Speaker—as guardian of the rights of Members of Parliament—investigate how the change of policy has come about, and why the House was not given notice of it, still less any opportunity to debate it?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman said, I had no notice of his point of order, and I have not been able to look at the question to which he refers. I am not certain that there has been a change of policy, but I will of course look at the question and the answer that has been given.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will have noticed during Defence questions that the Labour party's spin doctors had organised a campaign to get at the integrity and character of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. That is fair enough, because my right hon. Friend can look after himself; but may I refer to a particular remark made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)? He said that, while he was clutching a rifle—and God knows, I would be frightened to death if I saw him clutching a rifle anywhere at any time—my right hon. Friend was clutching a handful of white feathers. We all know the implication of that remark. Is it a parliamentary remark or not?

Madam Speaker: I think that tolerant language is better used across the Floor of the House. I heard the remarks that the hon. Gentleman refers to, but I also heard the robust response by the Government Front-Bench spokesman.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(4) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

That the Grants for Pre-School Education (Social Security Information) (Scotland) Regulations 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 3078) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Question agreed to.

Adoptive Mothers (Maternity Leave)

3.34 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for maternity leave for adoptive mothers and for connected persons.

When a child is born, her mother is entitled to time off work, to statutory maternity pay in most cases and to a guarantee that she can return to her job after her maternity leave. Adoptive mothers, however, are entitled to nothing. In bringing the Bill before the House, I wish to put right that gross injustice. In recent years, hon. Members on both sides of the House have made similar attempts, but have failed. We have waited too long. For the sake of the mothers, fathers and children who are directly disadvantaged and who do not enjoy the same choices as mothers who give birth to their children, we should act now.

In the past few weeks, I have talked to many despairing families who feel angry and frustrated. Lou teaches in Nottinghamshire. She adopted her first baby last year. She had to plead her case in front of a panel of colleagues. She deeply resented the fact that she had to talk about intimate personal matters, just to seek from her employers that which a birth mother would enjoy by right. She was granted adoption leave, but it was unpaid. She now wishes to complete her family by adopting another child, but her employer has told her that she will not be granted adoption leave again. She feels that she is being forced to choose between the family she loves and the job she needs.

Lou's story is repeated elsewhere. Yeter has worked for the Abbey National for nine years, but has been refused paid leave. Janet Alderson had to take ICI to an industrial tribunal after she was sacked while on unpaid adoption leave. Mrs. Harrison, a company secretary, was sacked by an engineering company in Sheffield, even though she offered to come in on Saturday mornings to make up for time off.

We all agree that giving children who, for whatever reason, cannot live with their natural parents, a loving home through adoption, is a good thing that we should encourage and promote. It gives those who adopt the opportunity to experience the joys of being parents, of creating a family and of watching the children develop and grow, and it gives the children the opportunity of a fresh start—perhaps the only chance to grow up as part of a loving and caring family. There are about 7,000 adoptions every year and about half of those are in existing families and to a step-parent, so about 3,500 children are adopted into new families, and not all those families will be affected, because not all the mothers will need or want to work.

More and more adoptions are of children who are older than a year. In 1975, 21 per cent. of adoptions were of babies under one; today, less than 7 per cent. come into that group. Furthermore, eight out of 10 children who are adopted into new families come out of the care system, so the alternative to adoption is often council care, which costs nearly £50,000 per child per year, whereas statutory maternity pay costs on average £1,700 per child as a one-off payment. That care involves being shunted between foster parents and institutions, rather than enjoying the security of a family.

Surely our job as legislators must be to remove any unnecessary obstacles that will keep children in care and prevent those children from having the chance of happiness in childhood. The Prime Minister has said that he wants to make adoptions easier. Giving adoptive mothers statutory maternity rights is one practical but important step that he could take to make good his intent, and supporting my Bill would give the proposal early effect.

There are those who say that only women who bear children need time off. That is nonsense. Gone are the days when having children was simply considered an illness. Maternity leave is about establishing loving bonds with one's child, adjusting to being in a family and learning to cope with sleepless nights. Adoptive parents need that time as much as birth mothers do, and one could even argue that often their need is greater. When a child has suffered from neglect or abuse, that child will need time and stability, particularly in the early days. All parents have to adjust to being a parent, whether or not they have physically borne the child.

In the past, the Government have made other specious arguments. Ministers have argued that extending maternity rights to adoptive parents is not possible, because parents who adopt cannot give their employers sufficient notice—but that is not necessarily true. It can take parents two years to go through the properly stringent procedures, to be accepted as suitable prospective parents, and employers will therefore know. If older children are adopted, there is a long period of contact between adoptive parents and child, and notice could be given in that period. Birth mothers currently need to give only 21 days' notice of when they want to start maternity leave.

In the past, Ministers have said that extending maternity rights would add to employers' costs. Again, that is short-sighted nonsense. Employers save money by retaining experienced and skilled staff; they lose money by advertising for, recruiting and training new staff. Good employers—such as Boots, the Body Shop and Marks and Spencer—have an adoption leave policy. The Body Shop also gives paid time off work for its employees to attend court for adoption proceedings.

Small employers now insure for statutory maternity rights, but as there is no statutory framework, they cannot insure for adoptions. Therefore, in the case of Shelagh—who works for a large charity and who adopted a brother and sister, aged three and four—her employers, although sympathetic, told her that they were not covered by insurance for adoption leave and could not afford to pay full maternity leave rates. Adoptive mothers pay national insurance, yet they cannot get statutory maternity pay. Even worse, if they take unpaid leave, they have to pay the employer's superannuation contribution during leave, whereas birth mothers are covered by the statutory scheme.

In the past, Ministers have said that it is too difficult to legislate and that it

"would not, in the Government's view, be justifiable, particularly in view of the relatively small number of cases involved."—[*Official Report*, 27 July 1993; Vol. 229, c. 997.]

What nonsense. Under the social fund, couples are entitled to a one-off maternity payment for each new child in the family, regardless of whether it is a birth baby or an adopted baby. If we can legislate for families on income

[Ms Margaret Hodge]

support, why not for families in which the mother works? If we wish to meet equal opportunities legislation, we can define adoption leave as being for the "principal carer" in the family, without referring to the gender of the parent.

I am supported on the Bill by a huge variety of organisations, including the Townswomen's Guild, the Mother's Union, Barnardos and the Association of Directors of Social Services. I am also supported by thousands of adoptive mothers and fathers, some of whom are in the Strangers Gallery today.

Finally, I should like to tell the House about Susan, who held a senior post on a leading women's journal. She adopted twin 11-year-old boys who had been in care and who had emotional difficulties. She asked her employer for some time off—some flexitime—simply to give her some space to help settle the children. When she approached her director of personnel to explain the situation, he said, "Why do you need time off? It's not as if they're babies." Women should not be discriminated against because they cannot have children. That cannot be right, and it cannot be just.

Adopting a child is not an easy choice to make for parents. For many children, it is, literally, a lifeline. By ending discrimination against adoptive parents on the issue of maternity leave, hon. Members can remove one obstacle that lies between a child who desperately needs a mother and a woman who wants to provide a loving home for that child. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Margaret Hodge, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Ms Janet Anderson, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Ms Estelle Morris, Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe, Mr. David Clelland, Mrs. Bridget Prentice, Ms Jean Corston and Mr. Paddy Tipping.

ADOPTIVE MOTHERS (MATERNITY LEAVE)

Ms Margaret Hodge accordingly presented a Bill to provide for maternity leave for adoptive mothers and for connected persons: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 101].

Orders of the Day

National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill is an important part of our programme. It delivers Government commitments to review the contract basis of the delivery of primary care in Britain and to open up options for the more flexible delivery of that essential part of the national health service.

The main purposes of the Bill have been agreed not just with those involved in primary care, but on both sides of the House. I should like to remind the House of the words of the chairman of the British Medical Association on the day on which the White Paper was published:

"We, the BMA, are fully behind the Department of Health in exploring the possibilities for making the delivery of general practice and related family services more readily available."

As I said at the time—on the same radio programme—it is not every day that the Secretary of State for Health appears on the "Today" programme with the chairman of the BMA and secures his endorsement for the policy to be announced that day.

What is perhaps even more remarkable is that, during the debate on the Loyal Address, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was almost fulsome in his welcome for the direction of the policy. He said:

"There is much in the White Paper that the Opposition welcome. We welcome the idea of an enabling Bill"—

which is precisely what the Bill is.

"We support the proposal to develop super-surgeries . . . I welcome the proposal that salaried GPs should be employed by community health trusts . . . There is much to welcome in the White Paper".

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), the Liberal Democrat health spokesman, went even further. He said:

"My colleagues and I, subject to finding that the Bill does not say what we expect"—

I think he meant to say, "does say what we expect"—

"will vote for the Second Reading of the Bill that has been announced.—[*Official Report*, 25 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 247-69.]

I hope that the Bill does not contain provisions that the hon. Gentleman did not expect and that he will feel able to vote for its Second Reading.

The Bill is not being introduced in a confrontational way. It is being introduced in consultation with those responsible for delivering primary care. When the policy was announced—at White Paper stage and when the Bill was published—there was a remarkable degree of

consensus in support of it, particularly bearing in mind the fundamental nature of some of the reforms foreshadowed and made possible by the Bill.

Some concerns have arisen since the announcement of the policy and I am happy to say that I hope to be able to deal with most of those concerns during my speech. The objectives of the Government and those involved in primary care are going down the same line, and I am anxious that they should not be derailed by misplaced concerns.

I want to begin by dealing with the background and the status of primary care within the national health service. I have made clear repeatedly the fact that I regard NHS primary care as one of the key successes of the national health service since its foundation. I believe that the success of NHS primary care in its broadest sense—the delivery of general medical services and other services through the primary care network—has probably been the key element in the success of the wider health service, in meeting health needs and delivering needs-led health care to the people of Britain.

The national health service delivers not simply good-value primary care, although it is certainly that, but care that responds to the specific demands of patients—it is close to the needs of patients and is, in the broadest and most important sense of the word, accessible health care for the patient. Primary care is based on the general practitioner, allowing the GP to act as the advocate and friend of the patient finding his way round the specialist services of the national health service. National health service primary care is an important success story.

However, even the biggest success story can be improved on. Some aspects of primary care need attention. We have an opportunity to improve further on the record of success. One example that is often quoted with some force is that, while high-quality primary care is provided in many parts of the country, too often we find that primary care in inner-city areas does not match the standards available in the rest of the country.

That is a serious issue. It is particularly serious, bearing in mind the mission of the NHS to deliver needs-led health care. Some of the greatest need for primary care is in those inner-city areas, where the service has not been as well developed as it should. The uneven distribution of the quality of primary care—in particular the failure to develop the quality of care in the inner cities as fast as in the rest of the country—is one of the concerns that the Bill addresses.

The Bill also addresses a concern at the other end of the spectrum. Some of those involved in the most innovative practices at the leading edge of high-quality NHS primary care find the national contract provided by the red book a constraint on their ideas to develop primary care. It places constraints on the development of ideas across the primary-secondary divide and of new ideas for skill mix and the use of the human resources available to the health service—through the pharmacy service, dental practitioners and other skills available to the dental service—to meet patient need more effectively. The more flexible contract structure envisaged by the Bill would help.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): The Secretary of State has spoken about the successes of NHS primary care and about problems in inner-city areas. Will he consider going beyond the provisions apparently contained in the Bill to strengthen the powers of health authorities, particularly regarding dental health? Is he aware that the dental health of children in the north-west is deteriorating rapidly? Does he consider that health authorities should have stronger powers to require fluoridation in areas for which they have recommended it?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that dealing with fluoridation would substantially widen the scope of the Bill in a way that I would not commend to the House. There will be plenty of opportunities to come back to the issue of fluoridation. I suggest that the House might usefully leave that subject for another day.

One of the explicit purposes of the Bill is to allow a more flexible contract structure for the delivery of NHS dental care, precisely to improve access for patients such as those whom the hon. Gentleman was talking about.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke–on–Trent, North): Will the Secretary of State tell the House why parts of the country, including my constituency, have virtually no NHS dentists? Often, the only option available to people is to take out insurance policies. Should not that situation be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission?

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): That is a novel approach.

Ms Walley: People cannot get access to NHS dental care. I do not understand how the Bill will remedy that.

Mr. Dorrell: As my hon. Friend the Minister for Health says, it is a novel approach to bring in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The Bill approaches the question rightly raised by the hon. Lady by giving greater power to health authorities—in agreement with general dental practitioners in the context of pilots under the Bill—to focus available resources on specific needs, providing precisely the access that she wants. That is a key part of the reason why I am in favour of more flexible contracting power between health authorities and general dental practitioners, and also why money has been provided to the dental access fund, to promote the availability of NHS dentistry in areas where access is a problem.

It is also worth remembering that the number of courses of NHS dental care available has increased over the past 15 years by almost 8 million. The service is not in decline—quite the contrary, it is continuing to grow. Where there are problems—I do not deny their existence—with accessibility, the Bill is designed to address them.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Secretary of State discourage the private sector from operating teams of dentists? Would it not be unfortunate if a supermarket employed dentists to provide a service? Those dentists should be employed through the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman's proposition is illegal under the Dentists Act 1984, and there is no proposal in the Bill to make it legal.

[Mr. Dorrell]

I refer now to the White Paper that the Government introduced last year, which foreshadowed the Bill. I stress again the role that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health played in the extensive consultation exercise that led first to the White Paper and then to the Bill. When I launched the listening exercise at the beginning of last year, it is fair to say that there was a certain amount of scepticism about whether anything would be produced. It is also fair to say that the scepticism was shared by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the predecessor of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, who noted her scepticism about the process. The hon. Gentleman stands acquitted of that particular charge, as he did not hold the health brief in time to be able to express scepticism. There was also a certain amount of scepticism in the field.

It is a tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister that he led a consultative process which, in 12 months, produced two White Papers, 70 developments of policy addressing some long-standing concerns in primary care, and the Bill, which introduces some important new opportunities in primary care.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton) *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I should like to make a little more progress before giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

I want to stress that it is important that the White Paper that led to the Bill, and the White Paper on primary care, "Delivering the Future", which was introduced in December, are seen together, because they reflect the output of my hon. Friend the Minister's work in the listening exercise. As I said, they bring together more than 70 changes in the primary care regime, which underlines the Government's determination to see the service continue to develop.

As a consequence of my hon. Friend's work, we introduced in December entitlement for primary care practice staff to the NHS pension scheme, the improved general practitioner retainer scheme, the extension of nurse prescribing, updated cost rent schedules, to be negotiated with the profession, a resolution of the long-standing issues surrounding the state of decay of and the perverse incentives on the use of health authority health centres, a new distribution formula—a weighted capitation-led distribution formula—for the general medical services cash-limited budget, and a total of £100 million of new money for the primary care sector, to deliver the service development to which my hon. Friend's work led.

The Bill does not simply introduce new contract models, although that is important. It is introduced as part of a broad-based strategy to improve, strengthen and reinforce NHS primary care as the essential front line of the health service: accessible, high-quality care, being delivered with the strong support of the Government; a patient-focused service, where the Government have seen important improvements over the past 18 years. The two White Papers reflect our determination that such improvements should continue through the five years of the next Conservative Government.

Mr. William O'Brien: The Secretary of State will be aware that, from 1 April next year, Wakefield health authority, which covers my constituency, will be entirely GP fundholding. It is a pilot scheme, the only one in the country. Does the right hon. Gentleman not feel that we have an opportunity here to have a single budget for primary care and acute care in hospitals? There could be a scheme whereby there was unified provision of services right across the district, and a back-up service to primary care. Does he not feel that there would be some benefit in considering that programme as a single exercise?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting proposal. If that is a model that practitioners and local health authorities wish to follow up, I certainly do not want to do anything other than encourage them to do so.

In coming to the House this afternoon, I had not expected bids for pilots to be promoted on the Floor of the House before the Bill had even received its Second Reading, but I am pleased to accept any bids for pilots from hon. Members who may have ideas, such as the hon. Gentleman's interesting and innovative idea on how the powers envisaged in the Bill might usefully be used to strengthen the delivery of primary health care.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York) *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman can barely contain himself. He is bubbling over with another pilot proposal.

Mr. Bayley: It is not another pilot proposal, but in the spirit of agreement across the House on certain aspects of the Bill, I welcome the introduction of a needs-based formula for the cash-limited part of the general medical services budget. Its introduction has, however, highlighted significant disparities in funding, with some health authority areas underfunded, relative to the national average, and others overfunded. Can the Secretary of State say how soon he thinks it will be before funding meets the targets—in other words, before each health authority is funded according to its need, rather than on the old historical basis?

Mr. Dorrell: As the hon. Gentleman correctly says, in the distribution that I announced in November, we introduced, for the first time, a needs-led assessment. Hitherto, the distribution pattern was shaped by demand. Introducing needs-led targets creates quite wide disparities between the top and bottom of the scale, between different health authority areas.

As to how quickly we move towards more even funding between different health authority areas, that will need to be judged year by year, in the light of the circumstances in the national health service budget as a whole and the GMS cash-limited element of it. Every time we use the weighted capitation formula system, it is important, where possible, to use it to allocate growth money without creating the feeling in one part of the service that the opportunity for growth or improvement in patient services has been exhausted or stopped for a significant time. The pace of advance is inevitably a function of the amount of money available and the other uses to which it might be put. It would be wrong to seek to reduce that to a time-limited commitment or a formula basis. It is properly a matter of judgment year by year.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): Does the Secretary of State agree that, unless far better information is collected,

for example on the incidence and prevalence of diabetes at local authority ward level, it will be impossible to know whether those needs are met? When St. Vincent declaration targets are set, we shall never know whether they are met unless we know what the situation is to start with.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that the better management of needs-led health care will increasingly demand higher-quality information on patient experience, the incidence of disease, the prospects of recovery from disease and, indeed, outcome indicators on the effectiveness of treatments that are offered to individual patients. That is an area where the quality of information is improving year by year. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a considerable way to go in improving the quality of the information that is available to the health service.

Against the background of the broad-based commitment to the development of primary care that I have described, I want to go on to talk about the philosophy of the Bill. It makes possible a more flexible approach to the contracts that underwrite the relationship between the health service and the independent contractor professionals who are responsible for delivering NHS primary care.

There are four essential principles underlying the approach set out in the Bill. The first, and perhaps the most important, is that the Bill does not provide for a single, broad-brush change in the contractual relationship between the health service and independent contractors. It provides for the Secretary of State to have power to authorise pilots of new contract models, and part I sets out the provisions that would determine the terms on which those pilots would be allowed to proceed.

Part I is concerned with the terms under which pilots of new contract models are allowed to be authorised by the Secretary of State; part II sets out the terms under which those new contract models can be converted into permanent arrangements. Clause 19(3), at the beginning of part II, makes it explicit that the Secretary of State must have cognisance of the results of pilots before authorising permanent arrangements of the kind envisaged by the Bill, be they for personal medical or dental services or for any of the contract models. Only when the pilot phase is completed do the powers under part II come into effect.

I emphasise that that is an approach to change in the contract models for those practitioners who want to take up that option, based first on pilots; only when pilots have been properly undertaken does the Secretary of State have the power to make the changes general.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I think that the pilot approach will be generally welcome. It appears that at the moment the Secretary of State envisages including general and dental practitioners but excluding nurses, for example, from being able to lead pilots.

As a simple example, there is a project for homeless people near the Imperial War museum that, it strikes me, could well be nurse-led rather than GP-led. Does the Secretary of State accept that it would be perfectly reasonable for a nurse-led or other professional-led pilot scheme to be recognised, if it proved satisfactory after appropriate testing?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman raises an important and interesting point. The Bill, as currently drafted, explicitly allows a nurse-led pilot, or indeed a partnership involving both doctors and nurses, to be a lead contractor for the health authority contract. I intend to table some amendments in Committee to deal with some of the concerns about so-called commercialisation, and I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance, without going into detail at this stage, that those amendments will not prejudice the right of nurses or of partnerships involving nurses to be lead contractors in the delivery of both the pilots and the long-term projects.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Secretary of State deal with the concern that the Medical Practices Committee may not have any control over qualifications, and the allegation that there will be no central working party controlling the pilots?

Mr. Dorrell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I deal with those subjects in the order in which they arise in my speech. I certainly propose to deal with both of them in the course of my remarks.

I was talking about the importance of the pilot-based approach, which is the basis on which the Bill is constructed. The second principle that I want to underline to the House, because I take it extremely seriously, is that the pilots must be properly assessed before we go on to the use of the general powers under part II.

Clause 5 provides specifically for the evaluation of pilots; it says that the Secretary of State has power to provide for evaluation and that that must be taken into account by the health authorities in the approval and promotion of their projects.

The Labour amendment talks about the absence of clear criteria for evaluation. If I may say so to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury in an open-minded spirit, I think that that arises from a misunderstanding. Inevitably, under the Bill, the criteria for success will vary according to the nature of the pilot that is being promoted. We expect that the purpose for which a pilot was designed would be set out in the paperwork supporting it. When that was set out, the criteria by which success or failure would be judged would be set out.

It would be difficult to set out criteria for evaluation in the Bill, or even in secondary legislation. The purpose of evaluation must be to find whether the pilot delivers the objects for which it was established. Those objects will obviously vary according to the nature of each pilot. The evaluation must be criteria based. That the criteria should be set out at the beginning of the life of a pilot is not controversial; it is clearly an important part of the discipline underlying the piloting approach.

Mr. Gunnell: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way. Is he able to tell me how long a pilot would be allowed to continue before the evaluation takes place? It seems to me that he has learned from other Departments that have conducted pilots and then acted upon them without actually getting any results from the pilots. Could he tell me how long it will be, because that obviously makes quite a difference?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman pre-empts my next point. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State in another place gave an undertaking there to table an amendment—and table it we shall—to provide for

[Mr. Dorrell]

a maximum life of three years for a pilot, to ensure that there is proper assessment of it within that time. I do not propose to table a minimum period, but clearly there must be proper assessment against a set of criteria. The concern in the other place was that a pilot might develop a permanent life by not being assessed at the end of a reasonable period. The amendment will be tabled in Committee.

The first principle is that we have pilots. The second is that they will be properly assessed. The third is that participation in pilots must be voluntary on the part of the professionals concerned. That is why clause 3(2) requires that there should be provision for professional participants to be able to withdraw from a pilot and states:

"The Secretary of State may not approve proposals for a pilot scheme unless he is satisfied that they include satisfactory provision for any participant other than the authority to withdraw from the scheme if he wishes to do so."

We cannot make the principle of voluntarism any clearer.

The fourth principle, after we have reassured practitioners that participation in pilots is voluntary, is that if practitioners decide that they are no longer committed to the pilot or if it is agreed that the pilot is not successful, the Government have undertaken that practitioners must have the assurance that they can return to practise on the existing red book or other equivalent basis. The conditions are set out in schedule 1, under which the Secretary of State has powers to provide for preferential transfer of an individual back to the local practitioners list. Schedule 1 is activated by clause 11.

The principles that I have made clear in introducing the policy are: first, that we proceed by piloting; secondly, that pilots must be properly assessed; thirdly, that participation must be voluntary; and fourthly, that participants must have an assurance of their ability to return to practise on the current basis if the pilot is not successful. The Bill provides for all four of those principles. The principles of voluntarism and the return ticket to practise on the current basis are safeguarded in the permanent schemes proposed by clause 20.

I underline that the changes to the contractual framework within which NHS primary care is provided represent fundamental but incremental change in the structure of that part of the health service. The medical magazine *Pulse* has said that I am an advocate of "big bang" in primary care—the implication being that, if the legislation reaches the statute book, all the ground rules and relationships in primary care will suddenly change. I underline—as I have done on many previous occasions—that that is not the Government's policy. I do not understand how one can pilot a "big bang". The principles of piloting, voluntarism, proper assessment and the return ticket for the practitioner are firmly entrenched in the Bill. They underline the Government's commitment to important—I do not seek to diminish the importance of the change—but incremental change.

The reason why the Government are committed to the process of incremental change relates to the point that I made at the beginning of my remarks. The fact is that NHS primary care is a success story. Its national contracts—in particular, the red book for general practitioners—are the foundation stone on which that success story is built. The continued delivery of services on the existing contractual basis must remain an option. That element of the foundation must be safeguarded, and we are seeking to extend the range of options. We are not seeking to diminish or undermine in any sense the continued delivery of NHS primary care on the proven basis of the red book and other national contracts, when individual practitioners wish to deliver care on that basis.

I wish to deal with some of the concerns that have been expressed about the Bill. First, clause 2(5) clearly requires health authorities to consult in accordance with directions given by the Secretary of State before submitting proposals for a pilot scheme. The clause says:

"an authority must (in addition to complying with any requirements about consultation imposed by or under any other enactment) comply with any directions given to them by the Secretary of State about the extent to which, and manner in which, they are to consult on the proposals."

The point about the statement in brackets is that the health authority retains the obligation to consult on any substantial change in the structure of the service under existing NHS practice. The clause imposes an extra obligation to consult on the structure of the pilot in accordance with the requirements laid down by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has made it clear that there is to be a commitment on the part of health authorities—and, indeed, on the part of the Secretary of State himself—to consult before pilots are agreed under the legislation.

That is why we have set up national consultative groups, and that is part of my answer to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). We have established specific consultative groups to deal with the concerns of GPs, GDPs and other professional groups, to ensure that there is properly based and properly representative national consultation, as well as the local consultation that health authorities must conduct. The obligation to consult is in the Bill, and is reinforced by the Government's assurances and actions in setting up the consultative process.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am sure that the Secretary of State will understand why some of us are sceptical about consultation, given our past experience. We consulted widely in Halifax about whether a local hospital should become a trust. Just about everybody said no, but because of the people the Secretary of State had placed there, the hospital became a trust against local people's wishes. Similarly, we do not want to lose 300 beds at the new hospital, and every consultation has agreed with that view. But the people placed by the Secretary of State are saying that we shall lose the beds anyway. Can he give us any guarantees about consultation?

Mr. Dorrell: Of course, I give the undertaking that the consultation will be serious, but consultation means what it says; it does not mean delegating the decision-making power to a group of individuals and nor can it mean that. It would a gross derogation of the position of the Secretary of State, who is responsible to this House for decisions, if decisions properly taken by the Secretary of State were delegated informally to groups over which he had no direct control. The proposition that there must be consultation before pilots come forward is provided on the face of the Bill, and, as I said, we have established a series of national consultative groups, to ensure that the

specific concerns of the professions about particular types of pilot that might come forward can be articulated within those groups. There will be a proper consultative process on pilots that come forward.

Let me refer to the second concern, which is, in a sense, about a specific form of consultation—the role of the Medical Practices Committee. I understand the concerns that have been expressed about that. Both my hon. Friend the Minister for Health and I have met the chairman of the MPC and we have discussed the subject with the British Medical Association and other interested bodies.

The position of the MPC within the existing red book contract remains completely unchanged by the provisions of the Bill. Regarding the position of the MPC in respect of pilots that come forward under the Bill, we propose to move an amendment in Committee to give the MPC a statutory right to be consulted, if the effect of accepting a particular pilot would be to change the total number of GPs practising in a particular health authority area.

The key interest of the MPC is a statutory right to consultation on the balance between different parts of the country. The balance within a health authority area is something that, in the context of the pilot schemes, we would regard as the primary responsibility of the health authority, although the Secretary of State has a clear responsibility to satisfy himself on all those issues before agreeing to any pilot. That is an approach to responding to the concerns of the MPC and those who have taken up its cause which has commanded reasonably widespread support, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Health will commend an amendment to the Committee to give effect to that.

I now come to the issue of so-called commercialisation. I have always felt that the concern about that is misplaced, because I have never made any secret of the fact that the purpose of introducing the Bill is to provide for a more flexible range of contracts to be available between different elements of the national health service for the provision of primary care. The examples that I have always quoted are those of bringing the community trusts into the provision of primary care; of providing practice-based contracts so that the contract does not have to be directly between the Secretary of State and the individual practitioner, but there can be contracts that bind the practice as an entity; and of contracts that deal with the delivery of health care without needing to observe the precise distinction between general medical services and secondary care, which is inherent in the existing legislation.

The purpose of the Bill—from the days when it was in the process, led by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health, of being born—has been to create a more flexible framework within the national health service. I recognise that some real concern has been expressed, both within the House and outside, which is why I met with representatives of the BMA, to examine whether there was a real difference in terms of objectives. In those discussions, it took us almost no time at all to recognise that we were agreed on precisely the set of objectives that we are seeking to deliver.

We have, therefore, concluded that the best way to address the issue is to ensure that, on the face of the Bill, only members of the NHS family—that is: trusts, NHS dentists, GPs, nurses, which answers the point raised by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, and the staff who work for them—should put forward proposals and hold the primary contract with a health authority, or a health board in Scotland, for the provision of personal medical or dental services where a doctor or dentist must be involved, to ensure that the appropriate medical or dental care is given.

We shall therefore move an amendment in Committee to limit the primary contracts to contracts between the health authority and members of the NHS family. It remains true, as it is true within existing law, that those primary contractors have the opportunity to bring in the private sector to provide the support mechanism for the delivery of their clinical service if they wish.

That emphasises the fact that it has always been the Government's intention to deliver improved NHS primary care. Whenever I have been asked whether there will be some supermarket-based surgery, I have emphasised that purely the opportunistic provision of health advice to people shopping in a supermarket is not what the Government are about. The Government are about list-based NHS primary health care, whereby GPs have a population basis to their practice, a commitment to health promotion, a commitment to the development of good health care, and proper prioritisation of health expenditure across the range of their patients. Those commitments will be preserved by the amendment that we intend to move in Committee.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South) *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I give way to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

Mr. Spearing: I have been listening carefully to the Secretary of State's words and imagining what an analysis would be when they are printed. Is it not possible for a GP-based service to be extended in co-operation with commercial organisations such as supermarkets, and is it not possible that they would provide facilities, perhaps at a lower cost than would be possible otherwise, to give the greater choice that the Secretary of State is now commending? Although that would not alter the contractual relationships that he properly outlined, would it not be a new move in our national health service, which would be controversial indeed?

Mr. Dorrell: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman about the implications. Already, very many general practitioners rely on private sector partners to support and deliver the improved surgery buildings in which many of them now practise. With several GPs I have sat through presentations of proposals by private sector partners to support their service development, and that principle is already in current practice, under the red book contract, of the delivery of NHS general medical services. It would be absurd to remove that option, which is regularly used by today's GPs to improve the service that they deliver to their patients. I hope that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to remove that from GPs in his constituency.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) *rose—*

Mr. Dorrell: I first give way to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I thank the Secretary of State. His announcement will be welcomed. It deals with the

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

principal concern that has been expressed about the Bill as it was drafted and presented. May I clarify what he appears to be saying—that the contracts that will be placed at the end of the pilot scheme and the pilots approved before that will in every case be between the authorities and, to use his phrase, members of the NHS family? Therefore, will the policing, regulation and so on remain the same as they have been until now, in that they will be professionally managed, and only NHS family members will be able to be the other party to the contract with the NHS?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that only members of the NHS family will be able to represent the contract with the health authorities. When he says "professionally managed", if he means managed by health care professionals, that is not necessarily true of trusts, but otherwise it would probably be true. I hope that that development will be as widely welcomed in the House as I believe it has been in the health care professions.

Mr. Burden: The Secretary of State has clarified some matters, but he has left some questions unanswered. Some GPs have told me that they can already be put under pressure by private health insurance schemes to use preferred providers to treat their members. If outside bodies are involved in the provision of health centres, how will the Secretary of State ensure that such pressures will not have an even greater impact on GPs?

Mr. Dorrell: With respect, the hon. Gentleman is confusing the pressures that may exist when a patient consults a GP privately—outside the scope of the NHS—with the pressures that might be felt by a GP operating under the existing NHS red book contract or one of the new contracts. A GP operating under one of the new contracts would not experience materially different commercial pressures from the GP who currently delivers NHS care from premises that have been developed in conjunction with a private sector partner.

Mr. Gunnell: How has someone who is as close to the Conservative party as Archie Norman got the position wrong? He must have misunderstood the Secretary of State, because he seems to suggest that Asda, which operates extensively in my constituency, would be willing to employ GPs. The Secretary of State has made it clear that that would not be allowed. Archie Norman is so close to the Conservative party that he seeks to become a Conservative Member, so how can he have got it so wrong?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman's remarks do not suggest that Archie Norman has got anything wrong or that there has been any misunderstanding. It is interesting that Asda might like to employ GPs, but I am interested in the delivery of list-based general medical care—as I have defined it many times before—with the population bias that is in the current red book contract. The two interests are different.

The question of health authorities' power to employ GPs is also mentioned in the reasoned amendment. I am not in favour of amending the Bill to include that power. If the provision of the purchaser-provider split—I shall not use the emotionally charged phrase "internal market", but shall stick to the phrase that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury prefers, and I think that the phrases mean the same, anyway—is to mean anything, the health authority already has the power to employ GPs and GDPs. In the case of GPs, the power is provided under section 56 of the National Health Service Act 1977, so there is no need to amend the Bill.

The Bill provides us with new opportunities to address the concerns that I mentioned earlier. I spoke of the importance of ensuring a more even distribution of care and the need to address the weaker areas of NHS and general practice primary care, especially in inner-city areas. We know that it is sometimes difficult to get GPs to commit themselves to partnership arrangements in some inner-city areas. That is what lies behind the enthusiasm of some young GPs and the community trusts to establish an employer-employee relationship to improve primary care in those areas. The Bill will make that possible.

I also talked of the need for a more flexible frontier between the family health services sector and the hospital and community health services sector. The Bill will allow more flexible contracting of the type envisaged by the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and will allow the health authorities to address the resource implications of such flexibility when they draw up new contracts.

Thirdly, the Bill allows more flexible use of the human skills available to the health service in pharmacy, optometry, dentistry and medicine, and in nursing and therapy as well. It brings all of them into the more flexible delivery of a health care service designed to meet the specific needs of patients of a particular area. That is the purpose for which the Bill is designed.

I regard NHS primary care as having been a success. The Bill works with the grain of that success story It addresses some of the weaker areas and reinforces the strengths of NHS primary care. I commend it to the House.

4.34 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill [Lords] because, while maling some welcome provisions for the development of National Health Service primary care, it fails to require health authorities to consult with patients and professional groups on pilot projects before submitting proposals to the Secretary of State; fails to provide for nurses and other primary care professionals to participate fully in pilot projects where appropriate; fails to establish criteria by which the success of pilot projects can be evaluated and fails to provide for health authorities to employ directly general practitioners; and because it includes provisions to allow private companies to employ general practitioners to provide patient care, thereby undermining the doctor-patient relationship and damaging one of the most abiding strengths of British general practice, which provisions will lead to even wider variation in the quality of general practice services available to different patients in different areas of the country and which will pave the way for the further privatisation of the National Health Service and the destruction of the principle of health care being available according to need and free at the point of delivery."

Out of courtesy, I give notice that if the Bill is given a Second Reading, I shall move that it be committed to a Special Standing Committee.

Before dealing with the Bill, I must deal with another matter. Just over an hour ago in the House, the Prime Minister appeared to attribute words to me as shadow Secretary of State for Health that I have never said. I believe that the person whom the Prime Minister indicated as the shadow Health Secretary was my predecessor four times ago—my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). I know that the Government live in the past, but that was taking matters a little far.

This is the Secretary of State's week for back-tracking. He seemed to spend most of yesterday trying rather unsuccessfully to extricate himself from the hole into which he had injudiciously plunged on the issue of Scottish devolution. Today, taking time out of his busy schedule to turn his attention to the health service, he has climbed down over a central feature of the Bill.

Do you remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how the Secretary of State protested when we raised the issue of commercial employment of GPs in the debate on the Queen's Speech? There was no problem at all, he claimed. The British Medical Association thought that his proposals were wonderful, he said. Even when Unichem and others started expressing a public interest in such schemes, the Government were convinced of the way forward. The Health Minister in another place stated explicitly that the Government were happy for commercial employment to take place.

There was a storm of protest. The Secretary of State put it rather delicately: "Some concerns have arisen," he said. There was protest from all the Opposition parties in the House. There was strong protest from the BMA and throughout the health service. Now, at last, the right hon. Gentleman has climbed down. We welcome that, but the mere fact that he thought that he could get away with it is worrying enough. It speaks volumes about the Government's real agenda. Heaven help us if they were elected again.

I shall return in a moment to the commercial involvement of GPs. My fear is that the Secretary of State is leaving a massive loophole in place, which destroys the fine words that we have heard from him this afternoon about the NHS family.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend may wish to consider this point before he returns to the matter. In reply to the intervention that he courteously allowed me, the Secretary of State did not specify a possible route for subsidy or assistance to GPs, possibly associated with pharmaceutical services, as he will be able to direct if the Bill goes through, or with health stores or other equipment connected with the promotion of health. That remains, if not a huge loophole, at least a roadway—probably to the supermarket.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right to pinpoint that problem, to which I shall return in a moment. In the meantime, I shall concentrate on the points on which we agree.

We welcome the broad shape and thrust of the Bill. I think that all hon. Members strongly endorse the concept of a primary care-led NHS. It is correct to put the primary care team—doctors, nurses, health visitors, pharmacists and others who are closest to the patient—in the driving seat when making decisions about care and treatment. The Bill proposes a number of ways in which primary care can take a bolder or a better lead.

For example, the proposed new rules for appointing general practitioners to single-handed practices make absolute sense, and we shall support them. They are long overdue. There are many single-handed practices in inner-city areas, and at present the rules state that, if such a practice falls vacant, an applicant who is potentially sufficiently qualified must be appointed to the vacancy—even if he or she may not be the right person for the job. The Bill remedies that by ensuring that appointments to single-handed practice vacancies are appropriate and adequate.

The Bill's provision on the employment of salaried GPs is also welcome. Recruiting GPs is a serious problem—particularly in some urban areas—and this proposal for their salaried employment offers a partial solution. The Bill correctly envisages the employment of GPs by community health trusts. That is fine and we agree with it, as I have said before in the House, but it also envisages acute hospital trusts employing GPs.

Are the Government convinced that that is a sensible proposal? If a GP is employed by an acute hospital trust—particularly if it is the main local provider of surgery and secondary treatment for that GP's potential patients—one must ask: what price the purchaser-provider split? The Secretary of State knows that I do not particularly like the term "purchaser-provider"—I much prefer the "commissioner-provider" division. However, it is an important distinction, and, if a GP is employed by an acute hospital trust to which he sends some or all of his patients, that distinction vanishes.

Why have the Government ruled out the possibility of health authorities employing salaried GPs? I think that the danger of blurring the commissioner-provider distinction is far less in that instance than in the case of acute trusts employing GPs, yet the Government state clearly in the Bill that health authorities will not be entitled to employ salaried GPs. We shall certainly want to return to that matter if the Bill is sent to a Special Standing Committee. The Government must sort out their reasoning on that point.

The Bill's provision for pilot schemes to develop practice-based team care and to develop new models of providing NHS dentistry is very welcome. We particularly like the Government's new-found enthusiasm for pilot projects—it is a pity that they were not so enthusiastic six years ago when they put the internal market in place. At that time, the then Secretary of State—the present Chancellor of the Exchequer—said that he would not entertain the idea of pilot projects as it was simply a way of ensuring that nothing got off the ground. As a result, he implemented the big-bang approach, which led to the internal market and to many of the subsequent problems. It would have been far better if the Government had realised then that pilot schemes, pilot projects and phased introductions were a much more efficient way of examining changes in the health service than implementing the internal market.

I have several questions about pilot schemes. First, what consultation will take place? The Secretary of State pointed out correctly that clause 2(5) says that there will be consultation, but it does not specify who should be consulted. It does not state whether patients will be consulted at any stage in the process. We believe that they should be consulted, and the British Dental Association agrees with us. It has expressed concerns about the nature

[Mr. Smith]

and extent of consultation before a pilot scheme is established. We need much greater detail and clarification from the Government about that specific point.

Secondly, what provision will be made for nurse-led pilot schemes and schemes that are initiated not just by nurses but by others in the primary care sector? The Liberal Democrats' health spokesman, the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), has also raised the issue. The Secretary of State has said that the Bill allows such pilot schemes to go ahead. However, that view is not shared universally outside the House, where there is serious concern about whether nurse-led pilots will be possible within the context of the Bill. We believe that that point should be clarified to ensure that such pilots can take place.

Mr. Gunnell: Is it not correct that that provision—in the form of an amendment—was explicitly rejected by the Government in another place, on the quite arbitrary grounds that the Secretary of State would recognise nurses' rights?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The Opposition in another place tabled an amendment specifically to address that issue, and it was rejected. We shall try again if the Bill goes to Committee.

Thirdly, what independent evaluation mechanisms will be introduced for monitoring and assessing pilot schemes? Clause 5 says that the Secretary of State has the power to provide for evaluation. However, it is crucial that evaluation criteria are objective and not politically driven. It is no accident that a proper independent evaluation of what has happened with single-practice GP fundholding has not occurred at any stage in the past six years—despite the fact that it has been one of the major planks of the Government's reform of the health service in recent years. Perhaps the reason is that such evaluation must be objective and non-partisan. We shall press that issue in Committee to ensure that the Secretary of State has a duty to initiate independent and objective evaluation commensurate with his powers under the Bill.

On the subject of consultation, I want to ask the Secretary of State a specific question about the White Paper that led to the Bill. Before he issued it last autumn, at what stage did he discuss its contents with the Medical Practices Committee? The committee has a crucial role to play in ensuring proper accessibility to general practice around the country. The MPC must retain its crucial role, which will be even more crucial as the pilot schemes are established under the Bill. It would appear that, before the Government published their White Paper, they did not tell the MPC what was going to be in it. That strikes me as surprising, if not foolish.

I want to refer to two other matters that could have been dealt with in the Bill but were not. The first relates to the training of doctors, particularly the pre-registration house doctor year, part of which should be spent in general practice. The Medical Act 1983 prohibits general practice training in privately owned premises, whereas it can be provided in a health service-owned health centre. That is ridiculous. The General Medical Council has been raising this matter for 15 years. We should encourage students to learn about general practice, but the existing law discourages them from doing so. Why will not the Government take the opportunity of this Bill to put that right? We will co-operate with them in Committee if they want to introduce proposals. I very much hope that this long-standing anomaly, which inhibits the proper training of doctors in general practice, can be and will be put right. We will do everything we can to assist that, if the Government agree.

Secondly, registration protection is required for the titles of "paramedic" and "ambulance". I was astonished to learn recently that anyone can put on a jacket with "paramedic" plastered across the back, can sit in his own private car with "ambulance" plastered along the side, can turn up at the scene of an accident and can offer assistance—sometimes perverse assistance—to the people involved.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): It is like the Secretary of State for Health speaking on Scottish devolution.

Mr. Smith: As my hon. Friend pertinently observes, it is a little like the Secretary of State speaking on Scottish devolution.

The bogus paramedic may arrive at the scene of an accident in flying tartan colours. He may have no skill and no training, and what he is up to is not monitored. He may cause mayhem. Indeed, the more I think about it, the more apposite the analogy becomes. Surely, statutory protection of such titles as "paramedic" and "ambulance" is needed, and the Bill gives us an opportunity to put that right, too.

I must return to the issue of commercialisation. The Secretary of State said that the primary contract for the employer of a GP must be within the NHS family. So far, so good: we welcome the Government's U-turn. But the Bill continues to allow, and indeed could encourage, the development of an association, including a financial relationship, between a GP and a private commercial organisation.

At present, a GP can subcontract an element of the provision of services—for example, to a deputising service for out-of-hours work. That tends to be the exception rather than the rule, and such action is heavily circumscribed. The health authority must recognise the subcontracted service, must check its quality and must limit the amount of time that it can be used. From what the Secretary of State said today, it seems that he permits and encourages the development of far stronger associations with the private sector.

I am concerned that, even with the Secretary of State's promised amendment, the Bill provides no guarantees about the limits on such commercial involvement in the provision of GP services. We need to know what restrictions, if any, the Secretary of State will impose. This practice is, potentially, wide open to abuse. He may have stopped direct employment, but he is specifically allowing commercialisation by other means.

If, for example, a GP were to develop a link with Unichem—it would be associated with him and would offer complementary services—what guarantee is there that the confidentiality of patients would not be put at risk? What guarantee is there that patients would not be subjected to overwhelming commercial pressures to buy the products of companies involved in a financial

partnership? Will the Secretary of State reassure other GPs, who provide a high-quality service and have invested their lives and savings in their practices, that they will not be completely decimated by the activities of a commercial company that has teamed up with a neighbouring GP? Those important questions arise directly from the Secretary of State's comments this afternoon.

From the moment the White Paper was published, we said that the doctor-patient relationship was at risk from the original proposal in the Bill. It is less at risk now that the Secretary of State has climbed down on the issue of direct employment. But there remains the possibility of commercial involvement with GP services, and that also threatens to undermine the doctor-patient relationship. It is still at risk.

As Dr. Ian Bogle, the chair of the GP's committee of the British Medical Association, said recently:

"The GP must be free to be the advocate of the patient and to exercise independent clinical judgement. Commercial organisations inevitably have other priorities such as the needs of their shareholders and the requirement for profit. There is no room for a third party in the doctor's consulting room."

That statement expresses effectively and strongly the concern that we still have about the commercialisation of the doctor-patient relationship. That is why I shall urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote for our reasoned amendment.

Given our concerns, I shall propose that the Bill be referred to a Special Standing Committee, for the simple reason that the Government have been all over the place with this Bill. The central feature of commercial employment has been withdrawn, but there is continuing doubt about the precise meaning of the replacement provision.

In the other place, the Government tabled 96 new amendments the evening before the debate on Report. They withdrew 89 of them on Report, but reintroduced many of them on Third Reading. Many of them were tidying amendments, which shows that the original text of the Bill was badly drafted and ill thought out. We need a Special Standing Committee to help the Government to sort out their own mind on much of the Bill. Two or three sittings in a Special Standing Committee, where we could take evidence, listen to representation and learn the views of the people involved in primary care would do a world of good and would improve the quality of the Bill.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend has raised an important procedural issue. Would it not be reasonable to assume that, if the Government oppose the motion of which he has given notice, they have something to hide which so far they have not made clear?

Mr. Smith: An impartial observer might, of course, place such an interpretation on any such action by the Government. It is also possible that the Prime Minister has a secret plan to call an early general election—in which case I think that we would be pleased enough by his decision to forgive the Government for opposing the motion.

Primary care is, of course, crucial. Many provisions in the Bill are welcome, but in some cases we feel that the Government have simply got it wrong. The process that has brought the Bill to the House has been cack-handed from the start, and there are ominous signs that the commercialisation of GP services will remain on the Government's agenda.

Quite simply, this Government cannot be trusted with the health service. They want to turn it from the proud service that it was founded as to the commercial business based on an internal market that it has, in fact, already become, to the detriment—above all—of the patients and others who depend on it. It is time for a Labour Government who believe in the health service to take over.

5.1 pm

Sir Roger Sims (Chislehurst): The Bill is about the provision of primary care to patients by doctors and nurses, and I want to deal briefly with each of those three groups.

First, let me say something about patients. It is clearly desirable for GP services to be convenient and easily accessible. I commend the idea of pilot schemes, and the flexibility foreshadowed in the White Paper and the Bill. The Opposition seem to be raising a hare in regard to commercialisation, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dealt with it very effectively. It is unfortunate that, having said that there are many good things in the Bill, the Opposition still appear determined to oppose it—although the main ground on which they seem to be doing so no longer exists.

I see no objection to the idea of general practices' being available in the most convenient sites for patients. Why not site them at railway stations, for instance? It is interesting to note that a private practice has been successfully established at Victoria station in the past few months. I also think that there should be far more practices in shopping centres: offering such facilities at Boots, for example, would accord very sensibly with the overall concept. I can imagine eyebrows being raised at the idea of siting a general practice at the back of a supermarket, but it would surely be convenient to have one immediately next to the largest supermarket in the district. Let us try out those ideas, by means of the pilot schemes referred to by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

However, I hope that we shall not lose the principle whereby patients are registered with GPs. In some countries, patients can go to any doctor they like, and, if they are not happy with the treatment that they receive from the doctor down the road, they can go to another doctor next time. Indeed, sometimes patients "shop around". Although I think that we should retain the system that allows a patient who is not happy with the doctor with whom he is registered, and who feels that the doctor-patient relationship is breaking down, to change to another doctor, I also think it important to retain the principle of registration. The practice should have all the records of the patient who is registered with it, and, if the patient transfers to another doctor, the records should be transferred as well. We should not discard that procedure lightly.

The Bill is about the provision of services by GPs. It is important for us to have enough GPs, for them to be trained to high standards and for those standards to be maintained. It is worrying to note that the number of

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trainees entering general practice has been falling steadily: between 1985 and 1995, there was a reduction of 20 per cent.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): In fact, the fall has been even greater. A number of trainees come from overseas, and, having completed their training, return to the country from which they came.

Sir Roger Sims: My hon. Friend makes a valid point.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) raised a specific aspect of medical graduate training. As he explained, new medical graduates must spend 12 months as provisionally registered doctors before obtaining full registration. Their training must include a minimum of four months in medicine and four in surgery, but they are allowed to spend up to four months in general practice. Most pre-registration house officers divide their year between medicine and surgery, spending six months in each. At present, only one university—London—has approved a general practice for pre-registration house officer service, although a number of others are keen to make such experience available to their graduates.

As the hon. Gentleman said, section 12 of the Medical Act 1983 restricts the experience of general practice that may be counted towards the 12 months of general clinical training needed for full registration to that obtained in practices based in publicly owned premises. The fact is that very few general practitioners operate from publicly owned premises. The House may be surprised to learn that, of 3,800 new doctor graduates each year, only three spend part of their pre-registration time in general practice.

Obviously, during their pre-registration year, graduate doctors will be considering how their medical careers are to develop, and deciding on which branch of medicine to concentrate. It is clearly desirable for them to spend part of the time in a general practice, and to see what goes on there. I suggest to my right hon. Friend that that merits consideration. All that is needed is the repeal or the amendment of section 12 of the Medical Act to remove the legal restriction with regard to the premises in which a pre-registration year can be spent.

The House will be aware that I am a lay member of the General Medical Council. As the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, the GMC has asked my hon. Friend the Minister for Health to consider taking the steps that I have mentioned. I know that he is not unsympathetic, but he has said that he is not minded to use the Bill as a means of making my amendment. I invite him to reconsider that and I hope that, perhaps in Committee, the opportunity will be taken to amend the Bill, which, after all, is about the provision of primary care services by general practitioners. I hope that he will take the opportunity to discuss the matter further.

There is also the issue of maintaining standards. The House will recall that it passed the Medical (Professional Performance) Act 1995, since when the GMC has been doing a lot of work on the mechanics of implementing those proposals. Tomorrow, it will hold a conference to take the matter further, with a view to implementation later in the year.

Under the performance review proposals, doctors who have not necessarily done something that merits the label of serious professional misconduct, but whose general performance standards have fallen below that which one would reasonably expect, can be assisted by the GMC to come back up to the standard that they should be at. It will be not a punitive procedure, but one to assist and to help bring doctors up to the standard that one would reasonably expect.

Of course, that will apply only to those doctors about whom complaints have been made. Perhaps in passing I could comment that all nurse have to renew their registration with the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting every three years and, when they do so, they have to satisfy the council that they have kept abreast of medical knowledge and development. There is nothing comparable in relation to doctors. Having completed his training and been registered as a doctor with the GMC, a doctor can remain on the register and, although he may go for years without practising, he can come back and practise without having had anything by way of refreshers.

I am not suggesting that that happens; nor am I trying to raise a scare about this. I know that much work is being done by the royal colleges with regard to accreditation. It seems that there is scope for steps to be taken to ensure not only that doctors are trained, as they are, to high standards—people would not come from all over the world to train here as doctors if we did not have such fine training facilities—but that they should maintain them and keep abreast of developments in the medical sector throughout their working life.

In 1986, a report was published by the then Mrs. Cumberlege, which recommended that the Department of Health should agree a limited list of items and simple agents that may be prescribed by nurses. In 1989, the Crown report put more detail on the proposal and made the point that enabling nurses to prescribe would benefit doctors, nurses and patients. The Government subsequently made sympathetic noises about the idea, but seemed reluctant to act, so, in 1991, when I was successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills, I introduced a Bill to enable nurses to prescribe.

After an initial lack of enthusiasm, the Department of Health embraced the proposal and assisted me in getting the legislation safely through the House, after which it was assisted in its passage through another place by the same author of the original 1986 report, who was by then Baroness Cumberlege, sitting on the Back Benches. It was just before the 1992 general election that I went to the other place and saw the Queen's Assent being given to several Bills, including my own, immediately followed by the order for the dissolution of Parliament to precipitate the general election, so I only just made it, but the Bill did get on to the statute book.

Progress since has been disappointingly slow. We have had eight pilot sites on nurse prescribing, but we still await the results of those. I am pleased, however, that, on what appears to be the eve of another general election, the Government plan to extend prescribing to a further seven trusts and their White Paper refers to full implementation by 1998. I hope that that will be adhered to.

Originally, the proposal was that only a limited range of drugs and dressings could be prescribed by nurses, and that nurse prescription should be restricted to district

nurses and health visitors. I believe that the pilots have shown that the range could be extended and certainly that the ability to prescribe could be given to more nurses. Practice nurses are an obvious example. Nurses in cottage hospitals and hospices where there are no doctors in constant attendance are another group that could be considered for prescribing powers.

When I introduced my private Member's Bill, there was some suspicion about it among doctors, who saw their role in prescribing being eroded. I think that attitudes now are different. Doctors recognise the value of a role for nurses in prescribing, which of course relieves doctors of work, saves them time and enables them to apply their skills in other ways. As the Crown report says, nurse prescribing benefits doctors, nurses and patients.

The Bill recognises that changes are needed in the provision of primary care. It proposes changes with an approach that, if any criticism could be made, is cautious. I hope that the House will give it a Second Reading.

5.17 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I am obliged to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me early in the debate to enable me later to attend a dinner with Madam Speaker. I am sure that the Government Front-Bench team will understand that I do not mean any discourtesy if I am unable to be here during the winding-up speech.

It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims) and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). It is nice to be in a forum where there is so much that we agree with, and, in particular, that the Minister for Health was so uncomfortable when he was being goaded almost and invited to respond to the points on section 12 of the Medical Act 1983. Being a lay member of the General Medical Council, like the hon. Member for Chislehurst, I want to develop in a little more detail both the points that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury have made on the matter.

It may be that, with a little persuading, the Minister will make an announcement in his reply to the debate. I am sure that, in his mind, he has almost reached the conclusion that, because of all-party support, he can very easily yield to requests for action. It is a discrete problem, and it stands as an issue on its own, quite apart from anything else that the General Medical Council is doing on its fitness to practice procedures.

As the hon. Member for Chislehurst rightly said, it is astonishing that only one university has managed to maintain a long-running scheme for pre-registration house officer posts in general practice. That one scheme is supervised by St. Mary's hospital medical school, at Lisson Grove health centre, in west London. The benefits of the scheme are well documented, and I am sure that the Minister—as he so regularly reads the *British Medical Journal*—will no doubt recall Joe Wilton's article of 11 February 1995, which documents that experience so well. If he cannot immediately recall the article, I am sure that he will be able to do so in the next few hours. Other arrangements to provide a spell in general practice have occasionally been made by universities—usually to deal with pre-registration house officers experiencing problems in their hospital training—with demonstrable educational benefits.

As the Minister well knows, the GMC is responsible for overseeing the pre-registration year. It wishes, as we all do, that year to be a high-quality experience for the new graduate, setting the seal on basic medical education and providing an excellent foundation for a career in medicine. The council has long encouraged the use of general practice in the pre-training year, but the legal obstacle created in the 1983 Act and in previous legislation still remains, and it is a major blockage. Last November, the GMC consulted on new recommendations for the pre-training year, and many educational institutions commented on that technical provision of the law and asked the GMC to press for its abolition.

I shall give only one example of the obstacle in operation, from the many examples that the GMC received. It is from Dr. Jamie Bahrami, who is the director of postgraduate general practice education at the university of Leeds. He responded to the chairman of the GMC education committee by stating:

> "I would, however, like to bring to the attention of the Committee that the restriction placed in the Medical Act on the use of Health Centre as the only suitable location for training in General Practice is outdated and requires urgent revision."

There is therefore a problem, although change has taken place and is taking place. General practitioners are increasingly practising in buildings that are not publicly owned, and the fact that those buildings are not publicly owned prevents medical schools from incorporating a four-month training period in the pre-registration year. Obviously, that situation cannot be continued indefinitely. It is an extraordinarily unsatisfactorily situation in which, out of 3,800 new doctors who graduate each year, only three have the option to do some of their pre-registration house officer training in general practice. That restriction to publicly owned premises no longer has any purpose or even any meaning.

Figures recently issued by the joint committee on postgraduate training in general practice show a fall in the number of certificates of completion of GP training from 2,562, in 1981, to 1,866 in 1995. The joint committee has also drawn to the attention of the Department of Health evidence of problems of recruitment to general practice.

Today's debate and the Bill present the Government with a crucial opportunity in their drive towards primary care led by the NHS. They provide the Minister with a wonderful opportunity to tell the House that he is now no longer prepared to tolerate that outdated, anachronistic and antediluvian obstacle. Instead of finding an excuse—I am sure that he would be able to trump one up; it would not take him long to do so, if he wanted to—he can take positive action and give a commitment that will encourage universities and their medical departments to move ahead in offering a four-month training period to trainee general practitioners in their pre-registration year, should they wish to take advantage of it.

If the Minister will do that, I am certain that it will encourage more GPs to enter that part of medical practice. Perhaps it will also begin to stem the loss of such GPs, because of the enormous pressures of general practice. If the Minister gives that commitment, I am certain that he will go down in history as the Minister who did at least a little bit of good, with all-party support, during the Bill's passage.

5.26 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I very much welcome the Bill and most of what it proposes—as do the majority of the general practitioners in my

[Mr. David Atkinson]

constituency, according to the outcome of a consultation initiative which I shall share with the House later in my speech.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is following a good example, I am happy to note.

Mr. Atkinson: I will return to the matter of consultations by Conservatives a little later in my speech, for the benefit of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), as he recently placed a letter on that subject in my local newspaper, and his comments were entirely untrue. I will remind him about that later.

If my general practitioners are happy with the Bill, so are my constituents. Many hon. Members will recall occasions on which doctors have not been happy with changes proposed by the Government and have not hesitated to use their surgery power as a source of patient protest. I hope that such confrontation between a Conservative Government and the medical profession is in the past—except for the occasional broadside from the current British Medical Association Council chairman in office, which is probably essential to his re-election.

Such avoidance of confrontation has much to do with the Government's approach, and particularly with their ever greater preparedness to listen to the professions. Nowhere has that been better demonstrated than in the Government's approach to the future of primary care. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and I support the tribute that he paid today to my hon. Friend the Minister for Health for his listening exercise. I believe that he has conducted that exercise on such a wide scale that use of a Special Standing Committee, as requested by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), is unnecessary.

I would normally have a great deal of sympathy for such a request, as I believe in the Special Standing Committee approach for very detailed and complex legislation—such as the Mental Health (Amendment) Act 1994, which used that approach and was much the better for it. On this occasion, however, because of the wide consultation exercise conducted, such an approach is not justified.

I believe that the Bill will consolidate the great success of the Government's reforms in primary care and build upon them substantially to provide the even wider range of services for patients which is its aim. It must be clear from what has been proposed in the two White Papers, much of which is provided for in the legislation, that primary care in this country will change considerably from next year: it will get even better, and will show that, through its national health service and general practitioners, this country continues to provide one of the finest health services in the world—a fact that is continually borne out by my constituents.

I accept that the dynamic changes to come follow almost constantly imposed changes over the past seven years—changes for the better—which general practitioners have not enjoyed. The new changes will succeed because they will be GP-led. The initiatives that the Bill heralds through pilot schemes will lie entirely with GPs and will not be imposed from above. I hope that such an approach will raise morale among GPs and encourage recruitment as well as leading to increasing rewards for them, as is their due.

Last month, anticipating the Second Reading of the Bill, I wrote to all the general practices in my constituency outlining what is proposed in the Bill and referring to what is in the White Paper entitled "Primary Care: Delivering the Future", which will also be implemented through the legislation. Bearing in mind that GPs are probably under even greater pressure than Members of Parliament—if that were possible—I enclosed a quick questionnaire for them to complete.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Did it come from Tory central office?

Mr. Atkinson: No, it did not come from central office—it was my own composition and I should be happy to send a copy to the hon. Gentleman, who might be educated by it.

I suppose that I should not have been surprised that less than half of those quick questionnaires have been returned so far, such is the work load of GPs. However, the replies that I have received have been interesting, helpful and supportive of the Bill. They all welcomed the opportunity to develop new services for patients. The only caution came from those who already felt overstretched in meeting existing demand from patients. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said again today, however, the opportunities provided for by the legislation are entirely voluntary.

There was no shortage of ideas for new services that my GPs would opt to introduce. Education on drug and alcohol misuse as well as detoxification and support were mentioned frequently, followed by dietetics, chiropody and physiotherapy. Such new services will follow those which GPs have introduced in recent years such as epidurals, vasectomies, sclerotherapy, psychology, counselling, acupuncture, adolescent clinics, participation in schemes for doctors on call out of hours and nurse practitioners.

That all represents an ever wider range of services which are for the greater convenience of patients because they are available at the surgery, closer to the patient, and it is all thanks to the Government's reforms in primary care. Only one failure was reported—by a GP who had introduced a dermatology service which proved too expensive for the health authority and is now back in the hospital.

I received less enthusiastic responses to my question about whether GPs welcomed the new opportunities for budgetary control of wider services. Most of them did not welcome that, because they did not see themselves as financial managers. That is perhaps not surprising, since most of those who responded to my survey are non-fundholding GPs and as such are in a minority among the GPs in the Dorset health authority area. Obviously, I am disappointed about that, as I am sure is my hon. Friend the Minister.

However, I should point out that GPs in the Bournemouth area have not seen budget holding to be as advantageous as GPs elsewhere in the country because of the already high level of service and management provided by Dorset health authority and the equally excellent Dorset Healthcare NHS trust and the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch hospitals NHS trust—I pay tribute to the chief executives, Ian Carruthers, Roger Browning and Stuart Marples. I regret that the Lib-Lab Bournemouth council has passed a resolution opposing the trusts and their self-managing status, and I intend to pursue that issue in the forthcoming general election.

It was not surprising to find little enthusiasm from my GPs for the opportunity to consider the establishment of new super-surgeries. The supermarket approach was regarded as totally inappropriate. The provision of a surgery service where people shop, and perhaps even a primary care centre where a range of services is available—such as a dentist, an optician and a pharmacy in a one-stop shop—is a bold idea and is more likely to appeal to the new providers such as the NHS trusts, private health care providers and other commercial companies envisaged in the White Paper, "Choice and Opportunity".

The future of the NHS is or should be about bringing the health service closer to the patient, not the other way round. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House earlier today, it should be about better ways of delivering national health services to patients.

My questionnaire also asked about the White Paper entitled "Primary Care: Delivering the Future", which includes proposals made possible by the Bill. The GPs all welcomed access to the NHS pension scheme for practice staff from September, but they expect it to be properly funded and not an expense to be faced by the practice. A reservation was raised by a constituent of mine who is a practice nurse. She said that staff employed by trusts and health authorities will have the automatic right to opt into the NHS pension scheme, but practice staff will not. She feels that that would divide staff rather than remove barriers. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to that concern in his reply, as he did in the letter that I received from him last week.

There was a broad welcome for the full implementation of nurse prescribing next year, with the warning that they must also accept the medico-legal risk of any complications rather than its being borne by the GP, who currently accepts the risk.

No doubt my hon. Friend the Minister will take account of yesterday's news about fraud in the payment system of prescriptions to pharmacists. Perhaps he will use this opportunity to comment on that.

There was little welcome for the easing of restrictions on overseas doctors entering general practice here. That will not surprise my hon. Friend the Minister, because he will be aware of the latest report of the medical work force standing advisory committee of the General Medical Services Committee, which said that it was wrong that Britain should continue to be a net importer of doctors.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims) said, the number of doctors training for general practice has been falling steadily over the past six years. Rather than lowering the standards by attracting overseas doctors, we should do more to train our own, perhaps by establishing a new medical school. I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister that a new millennium medical school to train more British doctors might be an appropriate initiative for our medical profession to commemorate the millennium.

I have found my consultation with GPs very helpful. As I have said, the results of that consultation contradict what the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said in my local newspaper, the Bournemouth *Evening Echo*, when he said:

"We"—

the Liberal Democrats—

"pride ourselves on always doing our best to find out what is really happening on the ground, unlike the Conservatives."

Having heard what I have said, I hope that he will accept that my consultation exercise is probably far better than anything that he has ever done in my area. I have been following the excellent example of my hon. Friend the Minister, who has listened to and learnt from the professions. I am sure that that has resulted in a better Bill and a better service to patients.

5.40 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) has a bit of a cheek. I am delighted that he has followed our example and has surveyed his general practitioners. I will happily swap my survey with his, so that he can see the best practice and realise the inspiration for such exercises. General practitioners in Bournemouth and everywhere else have probably never had so many surveys. If the Tory party is now encouraging its people to send them out, it is following the good example of my colleagues and hon. Friends. As the Minister has often said, we have been carrying out surveys for months and they have been very helpful.

I am not sure that the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East understood all the questions that he asked, or the answers. I am not pretending that I do either. Some of the services about which he was reciting responses seemed slightly beyond his present understanding, but we are all here to be educated. I was caught out on a similar subject yesterday.

On Second Reading of the National Health Service Bill, soon after the war, Mr. Clement Davies, then leader of the Liberal party, said:

"Surely, the one consideration should be: What is likely to give the best and fullest service to the people, wherever they may be?"—[*Official Report*, 1 May 1946; Vol. 422, c. 251.]

That was the right test then, and it is the right test now. It is always the right test for health service legislation. Our primary consideration should not be what is best for doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, radiographers or any other professionals, but what is best for patients. Of course, if the professionals are not on board and their proper concerns have not been addressed, there is a risk of the legislation not being good. That is the spirit in which my party approaches the Bill.

The Secretary of State said—subject to misunderstanding of the syntax—that so long as the Bill, when published, contained nothing fundamentally different from what was trailed and provided that it dealt with some of the concerns that had been and were being expressed, my hon. Friends and I would be minded to support it. I will therefore explain our position in the light of the Bill and the Secretary of State's speech.

The national health service is probably the most brilliant creation of the British welfare and social services this century. We have to go on building on this great creation. I am in favour of best practice and innovation developing in the health service. I do not want a drab, uniform national health service. To use a phrase from somewhere else, I am in favour of a health service where a thousand flowers bloom—but we are concerned that the blooms in the health service should be in a national health service garden and under the supervision of a national health service gardener. The danger, before the Secretary of State's speech, was that the Bill would breach that principle.

I acknowledge the way in which the Government have gone through the procedure. They published a White Paper and there has been consultation. The Minister

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

should not be full of self-congratulation about the consultation—to be fair, he has not done so thus far, but others said how wonderful he was. No doubt the consultation was carried out assiduously. I have heard some say that it was a good exercise, while others have been less complimentary. I suppose that that is the lot of any Minister. It was right to carry out that consultation.

I feel that one aspect, however, is missing from the procedures of the House. When a White Paper is published, consideration of it should be charged first to the relevant Select Committee before the measures are incorporated in a Bill. My hon. Friends and I have also often proposed the publication of draft Bills, so that the drafting errors that often occur can be ironed out.

I am not against the idea of the Bill being committed to a Special Standing Committee. This is not the most obvious Bill for that procedure, because of all the work that has been done already and the general happiness of the professions with the measures. I am slightly concerned that the proposal to refer the Bill to a Special Standing Committee may be an excuse to delay it. We have to have an election by 22 May and it is likely to be by 1 May, if not earlier. This would probably not be the first Bill to be considered in the next Parliament, so I would rather we put a Bill on the statute book before then, given that it has broad support.

Unless the wind-up speech from the Labour Front Bench persuades my colleagues and me that the Special Standing Committee has a specific purpose that can add to the benefit of the Bill without delaying it, I shall not be persuaded that it would be appropriate to support the idea. I am not opposed in principle, but I believe that we may be able to achieve the necessary changes in Committee.

I pay tribute to the work done in the other place. Unusually for such a Bill, it started in the House of Lords, where it was well worked over. I pay particular tribute to my colleagues, Lady Robson of Kiddington and Lord Alderdice, who did the bulk of the work for us. They picked up particularly on two issues. One has been addressed fully, but the other has not. The first was that there should be NHS pension rights for nurses. The Government have now conceded that practice nurses, in particular, should be in the NHS pension scheme. That is a welcome advance, which could be written into the Bill. I know that there is always debate about what is written into Bills, but I ask for that to be reconsidered.

The second particular issue raised by my colleagues in the other place was the length of pilot schemes. I am grateful to the Government for having moved on that. The Secretary of State dealt with part of the problem—saying that they should not run for more than three years—but the Government have not yet conceded that they should have a minimum period. My colleagues in the House of Lords argued for an 18-month minimum. I take a more flexible approach and think that they could be shorter, but pilot schemes—I welcome the fact that the Bill is pilot scheme-led—should have a minimum period sufficient to show that the water has been tested. The Minister could usefully accept a 12-month minimum.

I welcome the Secretary of State's confirmation that any of the professions in the health service can lead the pilot projects. Nurses and other professions will welcome that. They will be glad to have heard it and had it read into the record.

Most of all, I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State appears to have listened to the British Medical Association and all the representations made in the House of Lords and in this House by all Opposition parties, as the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, that we should restrict the opportunity for commercialisation. That is a considerable change of Government policy, and a welcome one. I regard it as a sensible move to get maximum consensus for the Bill.

I want to raise the matters flagged up in the Labour party's reasoned amendment which have some merit, especially the one dealing with commercialisation. Had there not been an announcement by the Secretary of State, my colleagues and I would have voted for the reasoned amendment. The announcement dealt with the reasoned amendment's main core, although I shall come to some subsidiary matters in a second.

I am prepared to accept that clause 2(5) guarantees—I take what the Secretary of State said to confirm this—that there will be consultation with professional groups and patients on all pilot schemes. I should say, however—the point has been made from the Opposition Benches before—that the health service's record on consultation is not one of brilliant success. We have all been through consultation processes during which the public have expressed an overwhelming view, but the blessed people in charge have ignored it. Will the Minister confirm that, as a result of the Bill, there will be a duty in law not only to take into account consultation responses but to give them reasonable and proper weight? If not, is he prepared to table amendments to ensure that?

Putting aside for a minute the fact that, at local and regional level, we have a very undemocratic health service, about which I have strong views, we cannot ask people for their views—whether on primary health provision, hospital closures or mergers—and then say, "Thank you very much. We have consulted but we are going to ignore you." When we have sought the views of doctors and professionals, just as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East, myself and others have, we need to take them into account.

The Bill does not address the question that has been raised on both sides of the House about how we will ensure that we have enough GPs for the next generation. I cannot express strongly enough that, unless we make general practice far more attractive, many parts of the country will be short of GPs just as they are short of NHS dentists now. It is a very serious issue indeed. Given that medicine generally for doctors will move away from being as acute based towards being more community-based and primary-care led, which I support, we must ensure that we recruit enough GPs.

I agree with advice that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, the other two hon. Members who serve on the General Medical Council—the hon. Members for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and for Gower (Mr. Wardell)—and I have received. We should amend the Bill—I hope that the Government will—to allow pre-registration training to take place in private practice premises.

There is very good practice around. My local medical and dental school, the United medical and dental school just over Lambeth bridge, has a department of general practice, and is developing ways in which to provide

training for GPs in general practice. We need to go down that road. We must ensure that the Government give high priority to GP training and the effort to bring GPs into the profession. We are short of nurses and specialists in some places and short of community nurses, but we are really short of GPs. We may have to do something about ensuring that we pay them adequate student grants to ensure that they enter general practice rather than hospital medicine.

The Bill does not deal with several important funding issues. The first, about which there is huge concern, has remained the subject of no comment at all so far. My colleagues and I believe that the greatest inequity in the organisation of funding for individuals in the health service is the fact that general practice is funded differently—depending on whether one is a fundholding GP or not. Until doctors are funded on a similar per capita basis for each patient, the funding system for general practice will be unfair.

Mr. Chris Smith: I am following closely the hon. Gentleman's argument. Can he, however, tell me how it is possible to base a population-needs funding assessment on a single GP practice? That is surely not possible. It is possible at locality level, however, where several GP practices are grouped together.

Mr. Hughes: I understand the question. I think that funding on such a basis is possible. I would be happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman after the debate about that. Fair funding would mean that, no matter how one organised one's practice, one would be paid pro rata according to the number of patients one treated. Such a basis does not differ according to whether one is talking about a single-handed practice, a six-partner practice or a collection of practices. The criterion for me is the same.

Secondly, we must have a fair funding system for hospital and local community health services. We have a capitation system and weighted capitation, which adds in criteria for deprivation, morbidity, mortality, ethnicity and so on, but we do not weight everything. The reality is that the system is still unfair. The Government are moving towards a fairer system, but until we weight the funding to take account of the needs of the community, more deprived areas will be at a disadvantage. Parts of my constituency, as well as those many others such as the hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury, for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) are deprived. All health service funding should be needs-based. That we have not yet established.

Thirdly, the Bill does not address the fact that, as is my party's view, GPs should be paid for their core services and additionally paid if they do other things. We need to ensure that that happens not only in theory but in practice.

Fourthly, as I said, I hope that we can write into the Bill that everybody in the NHS can be part of the NHS pension scheme, and therefore avoid the anomaly that people who worked for a GP who worked for the health service could not have pensions funded. That needs to be corrected.

The Bill does not address a set of issues about charges. It is inequitable and conducive to bad health to go on raising money from charging certain people for certain NHS services. I know that there is dispute about this. The Government have not accepted my view. I remind them that not only is my party committed to abolishing charges

for eye and dental checks: the Royal National Institute for the Blind in its briefing for today's debate makes the point clearly when it says:

> "An eye test is an essential part of any prevention strategy being not simply a sight test but also an eye health check".

It says that eye tests help to prevent blindness, and I entirely support its call on the Government

> "as a matter of urgency to extend the exemption categories for free eye tests to include those aged 60 and over".

It says that it would seek ways in which to use the Bill to achieve that.

I ask the Government in Committee or on Report to accept that there should be free eye and dental checks, as well as accepting the principle that, in future, we must review all other charging again—not just for tests but, for example, for glasses. A woman came up to me this morning in my constituency and said "Simon, I am having to pay a huge amount for glasses"—not for lenses, but for glasses—"which goes beyond what I can afford." The whole system of prescription charges and charges for services needs comprehensively reviewing. It needs to be simplified, and we need to avoid pensioners having to fill in a 17-page form for exemption from such services.

I am slightly confused about the role, as enunciated by the Secretary of State, that is envisaged in the Bill for the Medical Practices Committee. My understanding is that the MPC is meant to ensure generally that we have enough manpower. Although it will be consulted, there is a danger of the provision of services becoming divorced from adequate strategic planning.

The health service suffers badly from the lack of strategic planning. I know that the Minister will say that there are regional outposts of regional chairman—chairing nobody—but my party's view is that at almost no additional public cost we could have democratically elected regional health authorities in England and the same sort of bodies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Such bodies could be responsible for strategic planning and take advice from and be governed by a body such as the MPC.

Regulation needs to be strengthened. I argued yesterday for an inspectorate to ensure that hospital doctors, nurses, practices and super-surgeries are doing their jobs properly. It could be the umbrella organisation under which bodies such as the Mental Health Commission operate. We also need to ensure that we regulate the professions well.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury made a point that I was going to make about people who are currently completely outside the regulatory system. On a recent Radio 5 programme compiled by somebody I know called Ed Hall, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and I were asked for our comments about bogus paramedics, bogus ambulance personnel, and so on. This is a scandal, and we should deal with it. There are still many unregulated people around the peripheries of the health service, and there is no excuse for that. They could risk lives and, indeed, cause lives to be lost. We should ensure that the people who carry out primary health care are authorised, professionally competent and certified as able to do the work.

Finally, if we are to ensure that doctors are true to their Hippocratic oath and to themselves, and that they are free agents for the health service, we must ensure that they are not able to be bought, as it were, by other interests. The Secretary of State was helpful in saying that in future all

[Mr. Hughes]

the people who contract, for the purpose of the pilot schemes, will have to be in the NHS family. I accept that. I strongly share the view—and I have received representations on this—that it would therefore be quite wrong for acute hospital trusts to employ GPs. These trusts should not be empire building—they have plenty to do in running their present services. I hope that the Bill will be amended to make it clear that, at most, only community trusts or those with community purposes might be able to employ GPs. I hope that we can reach agreement on that.

If we are to be absolutely sure that a coach and horses cannot be driven through the theoretical provision that contractors with the NHS will be members of the NHS family, there has to be the same openness—or better—for people in the health service that we in this place are now required to have. All contracts with GPs need to be in the public domain so that I, the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East and all our colleagues, but above all the public, know exactly with whom the GPs in each constituency have contracts and for what services.

I am absolutely in favour of having GPs in my local shopping centre at Surrey Quays. That is fine. I have no problem with that. I have no problem about having GPs in the Elephant and Castle shopping centre or at Victoria station. I am very keen that they should be where the people are. I have never been to Lakeside, that great shopping centre in Essex where everybody goes, which is the largest in the country, although my brother and his wife go there quite often. If thousands of people do all their shopping there, it should have GP surgeries. That is fine, but we have to know that they are independent, free-standing surgeries of GPs who are not dancing to the tune of a supermarket, a drugs company or a load of international arms dealers. How can we know? There has to be a register that every member of the public, every patient, every Member of the House of Commons can look at. That independence must be established at the core of the Bill.

We are moving towards a health service that will have much less conventional practice. We need to take it out into the public, just as the best public health in the early part of the century was taken out to the public in the streets, on the beaches, in the fairgrounds, and so on. At the same time, we need to ensure that people understand that the person with whom they are dealing is an NHS contractor.

Above the optician, the dentist, the doctor, the physiotherapist and the clinic should be a sign in bold letters to say that this is somebody who works for the NHS. The great guarantee in our health service has to be that the practitioner is under independent scrutiny, acting professionally for the public health service, and regulated by the public health service in the interests of the public. If we do that, primary health care has a great future, but, if we allow it to be subsumed and captured by private interest, principally for private gain and profit, the public service will be put second and the patient will certainly be put second as a result.

6.3 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) made a comment that I thought particularly interesting. Having talked about the history of the health service, he said that we must continue to build on that great record. It is a shame that he did not go on to say that two thirds of the history of the health service has been under Conservative Governments. It is sad that we are so often told that we have run down the health service, when the great institution that we are talking about today, which we seek to improve further for the millennium and into the next century, has been created under Conservative policies and backed by Conservative spending plans. We are, however, at one in our desire to see that its great record is built on for the future.

The main reason why we are here today is to look at how to build on the success of the health service and at how we can take it forward to meet the health needs of the country into the next century. Since the Conservative Government came to power, spending on the health service has gone up by 74 per cent.—by almost three quarters. Whereas we are now spending £724 each year on the health service for every man, woman and child, 18 years ago the sum was just £444 in real terms.

There has been an incredible increase in the money that has been put into the health service, and I think that we all agree that that is right. That is why Conservatives so much welcome the Prime Minister's pledge that throughout the term of the next Parliament, for each of those five years, a Conservative Government will increase investment in the health service in real terms. It is unfortunate that the Opposition parties, which make great play of their commitment to the health service, are not willing to repeat that commitment—

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Liberal Democrats are.

Mr. Hendry: Certainly the minority Opposition party is, but it is willing to commit to spend money on absolutely everything. It is a shame that the Labour party has not been willing to repeat that commitment and show its commitment to the future funding of the health service.

Our policies have enabled us to improve the service as it is delivered in doctors' surgeries and hospitals throughout the country. There are 55,000 more nurses than there were 18 years ago, and there are 22,500 more doctors and dentists—including 3,500 more NHS dentists, which is often overlooked—than when the Government came to power in 1979. There has also been a significant onslaught to reduce the weight of administration, accepting that there has to be good administration but recognising that it should not be at the cost of patient care.

On average, there is now one senior manager to 77 other members of staff working in medical provision in the health service. That ratio is very low and it should be recognised as such. It is unfortunate that the Opposition seek to make cheap points out of that and undermine the good and important work that is done by a very able team of administrators in our health service.

It is also a fact that, over the past 10 years, some 750 schemes costing more than £1 million each have been completed. That is more than one a week, and it is testimony to our determination to continue to create an improvement in the physical presence of the health service in our communities by improving buildings and building new hospitals to meet future needs.

We have seen a dramatic drop in waiting lists. In 1987, 200,000 people were waiting more than a year for treatment on the health service. That has now dropped to

just 15,000. That is a fantastic testimony to those who work in our health service. They deserve our credit and thanks for what they have done. It is also true that half of those who need hospital treatment are seen at once. Half of the remainder are seen in five weeks. Only a minute fraction wait for 12 months or more. The reality is that we are now treating some 4 million patients a year more than in 1979, and we are treating 2,250,000 more than in 1991 when the health service reforms started.

We should remind ourselves of the words of the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). It was he who said that the acid test of health service reforms would be whether they treated more patients. I notice that the shadow spokesman on health tried earlier to dismiss the words of the right hon. Member for Livingston, because if they were made by his predecessor by four they were of no relevance. We should go back to those words. If the acid test is whether the reforms will treat more people, we are now treating 2,250,000 more patients than when the reforms were started.

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is extremely difficult to know whether the NHS is treating more patients, because, under the Conservative Government, the NHS counts not patients but "finished consultant episodes"?

Mr. Hendry: The reality is that under the last Labour Government we had no idea whatever of the level of activity, because the figures were not collated. We did not know how much operations or drugs cost, because Labour did not believe in measuring such costs. It is only because of the measures put in place by the Government that we can make such comparisons and realise that we are making improvements in the number of patients being treated.

I accept what the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) is trying to get at, but the reality is that we are treating more patients, treating them faster, and bringing down waiting lists; and we have almost completely done away with waiting lists of 12 months or more.

The issue of fundholding is at the core of the debate. By April this year, 60 per cent. of the country will be covered by fundholders. That is disappointing in a way; it represents significant strides, but in my constituency more than 90 per cent. of patients are covered by fundholders. Because that percentage is so high, the benefits that fundholders have achieved for their patients have been enjoyed by all members of the community, regardless of whether they are personally covered by a fundholder.

I want to take the House on a tour of some of the new facilities in my constituency, to bring home how the changes have benefited us. In Glossop, in the very north of my constituency, the Manor House surgery run by Dr. Oldham and his colleagues has been transformed. It has developed into one of the most outstanding doctors' practices anywhere, and was recently voted the fundholding practice of the year.

All the doctors' practices in High Peak are breaking new ground and providing better services. In New Mills, a town of almost 10,000 people, Dr. Williams and his colleagues have developed a stunning new surgery, one of the most modern and elegant that I have seen. Patients feel that they are being treated like human beings, with respect and dignity; they feel that they are getting the best possible treatment, because they are not in shabby and rundown surroundings.

The same doctors' practice has opened a new surgery in Hayfield, which did not previously have a surgery, providing better facilities for people in small villages. In Chapel-en-le-Frith two new surgeries have been constructed: one by Dr. Bartholomew and his colleagues, and one by Dr. Oliver and hers. Dr. Bartholomew has also built a new surgery in Whaley Bridge. Those doctors are extending and improving the facilities that they offer and delivering better health care.

In Hope, Dr. Moseley and his colleagues have built a new practice; and there are new premises in Buxton. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) is on the Front Bench today, I should mention the facility at Eyam, which is in his constituency but serves some of my constituents. Right across the area there has been new investment in better surgeries, run by a team of young, dynamic, go-ahead general practitioners who are determined to make fundholding work and who want to build on the success of our health service with the best-equipped surgeries that the country has ever known.

Last September, I brought the Prime Minister to my constituency and took him to one of those doctors' surgeries. The day did not start off terribly well: I asked some of the people standing outside the surgery, who had clearly seen that something was going on, why they had turned up. They said that they had been looking out of their window and, seeing all the police cars converging on the surgery, had come down because they thought that a drugs raid must be—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman must relate his remarks to the Bill. He has certainly not done that for the past couple of minutes.

Mr. Hendry: My comments, with great respect to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are designed to show how fundholding is benefiting our patients and our constituents and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman knew my antecedents in relation to general practice, he would not need to make that remark.

Mr. Hendry: I accept your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Bill, which is so important, seeks to build on what has been achieved. We have a tremendous amount to be proud of. Like other hon. Members, I have consulted general practitioners in my area about the way in which they want matters to proceed. They recognise the progress that has been made and that it would not have been possible without the changes introduced by the Government; but they also recognise the need to take matters further in the future.

Practitioners talk about how they have developed new services, such as a drugs cabinet in the hospital at Tameside; the unused drugs of patients being discharged are placed in the cabinet to be re-used, rather than being wasted as they were before.

[Mr. Hendry]

There is a tremendous list of new facilities; my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) referred to some in his constituency, and it is the same in mine: today, we have audiology in Glossop; direct listing of gynaecology services; new dermatology teach-ins; an additional district nurse; physiotherapy and occupational health services; direct links with the pathology laboratory; complementary therapy, such as Alexander treatment and acupuncture; new chiropody services; and something called sigmoidoscopy, about which you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, probably know more than I do—it does not sound awfully nice.

Through fundholding, general practitioners have been able to bring down the waiting lists for everybody in the community—not only for fundholders' patients, but for all who use the services. Previously, the wait for dermatology was two years; now it is only four weeks. For gynaecology it was up to 20 weeks; now it is only four. For ear, nose and throat treatment, it has been reduced again, from 20 weeks to four. The average waiting time for in-patient treatment has been brought down from 18 months to 3.7 months.

That does not apply only in the large practices; progress has been made in small practices, too. Dr. Cox, who runs a surgery in Tideswell, says:

"In our case we now have numerous outreach clinics involving consultants from Sheffield and Chesterfield. Thus our patients are saved long journeys and waiting lists are greatly reduced.

In addition, we have introduced physiotherapy, dietetics and recently Citizens advice into our surgery. We may have introduced these services in time but there is no doubt that the internal market has empowered fundholders and providers now listen with an open ear."

I hope that the Bill will build upon such changes. We must address the concerns that exist and recognise that some improvements need to be made. I have concerns about the way in which doctors' practices sometimes work in relation to the district health authority, when it appears that their budgets are easy pickings. I am concerned that North Derbyshire health authority, having top-sliced 5 per cent. off its budgets last year, is planning to do the same again this year.

For a relatively small surgery, that could mean a reduction of £40,000 in one year. I hope that the Minister will bear such practices in mind and reassure the House that he will try to ensure that they have security in their budgeting plans for the future.

We need to reconsider the efficiency index, whereby GPs are expected to improve their levels of activity by 2.75 per cent. each year. They are well able to meet that: one GP's practice in my constituency was able to increase its efficiency by more than 34 per cent. in one year alone. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will examine the ratio set by the Department of Health, whereby one episode in secondary care equates to 54 in primary care. I think that he would accept that that represents a big disincentive to health authorities to reconfigure their services, and that it should be reassessed.

I am concerned also about the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims), who spoke about the recruitment of new GPs. There appears to be evidence that we are finding it difficult in many parts of the country, and especially in inner cities, to recruit new people to general practice.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider how the problem can be tackled head on. I thank him for his help, on a visit to my constituency a year or 18 months or so ago, in the matter of out-of-hours support. He directly addressed the concerns of GPs and enabled a formula to be found whereby their needs, in a generally rural area, could be met. It is clear, however, from other GPs' practices, that they have not all been able to find solutions, and I hope that we will continue to examine the matter to ensure that we can deal with it effectively and for all.

The key point regarding all such concerns is that the Government are addressing them; they know that they exist and they are seeking to build on what has been done, to make the health service better for the future.

The core of the Bill—this is why I support it so strongly—is that it reflects patients' wishes and recognises that GPs know what is best for their patients. They know that patients would like to be treated closer to home if that is possible. They know that patients would be happy for their GPs to carry out minor surgery, if that is possible. The principle is that, where appropriate, care should be carried out at primary, not secondary, level. That is important in a constituency such as mine. Many of my constituents are referred to general hospitals some miles away in the big cities. They may have to go to Tameside, Stockport, Manchester, Macclesfield, Sheffield or Chesterfield because they come from a spread-out rural area. The more that we can enable things to be done in people's localities, the better it is for us all.

We should give GPs the opportunity to advance the pilot projects that they believe are possible because they know better than we ever could—and better than health authorities or any elected body, whatever the Liberal Democrats may suppose—what is possible. They have the vision to make it happen. It is vital that we impose as few restrictions as possible on what can be done. We need to encourage GPs to think widely. That is why I read the Opposition's reasoned amendment with sadness. It states that the Bill

"fails to require health authorities to consult with patients and professional groups on pilot projects before submitting proposals to the Secretary of State".

I do not believe that that should be a requirement, because it is GPs who are most trusted.

If people were told by their GPs that they were going develop our health service in a certain way, people would trust them; there is no one people trust more. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East said, if GPs are happy, so are my constituents. That is because the trust is so great. To build in an unnecessary level of consultation with people who do not know as much about the issues, who might be worried about change and will not be readily reassured by GPs would be a mistake. GPs should have the ability to work up their pilot schemes and have them taken to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman referred to the reasoned amendment. The Minister will no doubt deal with this later, but unless I misunderstand, under clause 2(5), there must be consultation about pilot schemes before they are submitted. I think that that is important. The hon. Gentleman will have to persuade his colleagues as well as the Opposition if he wants to remove

consultation. I urge him to think again. Involving patients and the public in decisions is a hugely important way of developing primary care.

Mr. Hendry: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I was quoting from the reasoned amendment one of the Opposition's reasons for objecting to the Bill.

One can push consultation too far and stifle enthusiasm so that GPs do not go ahead with some of their more exciting and dramatic ideas because they lack general support. It would be a tragedy if such enthusiasm were stifled because of the consultation process.

It is also unfortunate that the reasoned amendment states that the Bill

"fails to establish criteria by which the success of pilot projects can be evaluated".

I do not understand how that can be done in advance. If we say that GPs should be encouraged to produce ideas for pilots and think widely, we cannot now establish the criteria for all circumstances because we do not know what the pilots will be. It is in the light of the proposals that are made that we will best be able to judge how the pilots should be evaluated.

Four key principles that underlie the Bill should be put on record. Patients must continue to have the right to be registered with a GP. A disadvantage of some overseas systems is the lack of registration with a particular GP. Such systems involve additional bureaucracy and mean that records cannot be so readily brought to hand.

Concern has been expressed about the involvement of GPs within shopping centres. I do not believe that people trundling a shopping trolley round Tesco would want to visit a GP by going through a little door between the frozen peas and the band-aids. If I were shopping in Tesco and there was something wrong with me, the last thing that I would want is for my constituents to see me popping in to see the GP there. Many people would feel like that. That is why some of the more extravagant schemes dreamed up by the Opposition would not be put forward. GPs may wish to open centres where people are at work, in stations and in shopping centres but they would be wary of being brought under the direct control of a supermarket or similar organisation.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I want to reinforce an important point which was implicit in what the hon. Gentleman said. There are many services that it is hugely important to keep confidential, such as family planning and sex advice to young people. In such cases, people would not want to be seen popping in to see GPs in a supermarket. A range of things will be needed. For well women or well men services, or blood pressure checks, the nearer the service is to where hundreds of people shop, the better. No one would be embarrassed by such check-ups.

Mr. Hendry: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. We must remember that the people who will be pushing the schemes and developing the ideas are those who are most sensitive to patients' needs: the GPs. The more extravagant schemes would not be put forward.

I said that there were four principles. The second is that legislation should ensure that there are national safeguards for both practitioners and patients. Thirdly, there must be public accountability for the use of funds. Fourthly—this is vital—if pilots are unsuccessful, it must be possible to revert to the previous arrangement. If a pilot scheme did not work and GPs could not go back to their earlier arrangements, many GPs would be reluctant to try the scheme.

I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure us, here or in Committee, that pilot schemes can be worked up free from the stifling intervention of health authorities that do not like the proposals. Clause 2(2) states:

"Subject to any directions given to them by the Secretary of State, an authority must—

(a) prepare proposals for a pilot scheme, and

(b) submit them to the Secretary of State,

if asked to do so by a qualified person who wishes to provide piloted services."

Clause 2(3) states:

"A request to an authority under subsection (2) must—

(a) be made in writing; and,

(b) comply with such requirements (if any) as may be prescribed."

I hear a little alarm bell in respect of what may be prescribed under the final section about what requirements may be set down.

I am concerned that it should not be possible for a health authority to stifle go-ahead, dynamic GPs who have ideas that are not entirely in keeping with those of the health authority. Even if health authorities do not believe that such ideas are the best way forward, I hope that the Secretary of State will continue to bear in mind the fact that there should be a wide cross-section of projects so that the best proposals can be developed.

Mr. Bayley: Inevitably, there are good and bad general practitioners and practices. That is recognised by the provision in the Bill that a GP does not automatically have to be appointed if he is deemed to be unsuitable. If a health authority is not to sort out the good pilot projects put up by GPs from the bad, who will?

Mr. Hendry: There are different grounds whereby a health authority may raise concerns. If an authority says that a GP is an alcoholic or has something fundamentally wrong with him, that would be relevant and should be taken into account. But the fact that a pilot scheme proposes something that is not immediately in tune with what the health authority thinks is the way forward should not rule it out. If the health authority is to be directly involved, there needs to be a right of appeal directly to the Secretary of State, so that good, exciting and innovative projects are not knocked on the head early in the consultation process.

I hope that the Bill receives cross-party support. It is encouraging that Labour is, lately, agreeing that fundholding has been beneficial, but its proposals for locality-based commissioning are not what fundholding or non-fundholding doctors want. In my constituency, GP fundholders can cover between 3,000 and 10,000 people. To suggest that GPs should cover areas of between 50,000 to 150,000 people is to be out of touch.

It is strange to hear Labour talking as if pilots were its idea and that there should have been pilots when fundholding was introduced. I was working at the Department of Health as a special adviser at that time, and we knew why Labour wanted pilot schemes—it wanted to kill off the idea of fundholding at birth. Labour did not

[Mr. Hendry]

want the system to have time to grow, and it wanted to make sure that the system moved at a snail's pace so it would not be a success.

This important Bill shows the way forward, and will lead to a better NHS that will serve patients better. The Bill will prepare the health service for the challenges of the next century. Above all, it shows that the Government are listening to GPs, because they know what is best for their communities and for their patients, and they will work to find an exciting future. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.31 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I should like to start by responding to one of the arguments made by the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry). He sought to convince the House that the Opposition parties argued for pilot studies rather than for a leap in the dark at the time of the "Working for Patients" reforms, because we wanted to frustrate their implementation. He said that that was perfectly clear to him when he worked at the Department of Health. I suggest that that shows how out of touch those involved in developing the project in government were with the mood within the health service.

At the time, I was working in a university as a health economist on contract to health authorities, and people in the health service and academic commentators said time and again that it was necessary to set clear standards, to evaluate whether the health reforms were both effective in terms of improving patient care and cost-effective. Those in government who were driving the "Working for Patients" project stood in the way of evaluation because they felt that it might reveal that the proposed reforms were not in the best interests of patients. The same lobby of NHS staff and commentators had argued for years that there should be a thorough and independent analysis of the benefits, as well as the disadvantages, of GP fundholding. The Government resisted that.

Finally, the Audit Commission carried out such an assessment in a report—I understand that the Department of Health used every trick in the book to try to persuade it not to undertake it. Yet last year the report was published, and what did it find? It found that some benefits had come from fundholding, and some costs. It quantified the benefits and costs, and found that benefits for patients worth £202 million had been achieved at a cost to the NHS of £236 million. In other words, the benefits were less than the costs.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the hon. Gentleman make it plain whether those costs were one-off and whether the benefits were annual? Is he comparing like with like?

Mr. Bayley: That is a good point. The report looked at the cumulative costs and benefits of the fundholding scheme. One could certainly re-examine the system were it to continue for another five years, but that is unlikely—even if there is no change in Government. The Bill demonstrates to the House and to the country that fundholding has not been the panacea that it was originally supposed to be, and that it is not enough to ensure that high-quality primary health care is provided for everybody. But if fundholding were to continue, we could review it.

It is important to draw on the independent analysis, to pick out the benefits that have come from fundholding and to retain them, while chucking into the dustbin of NHS history the disadvantages—the inequity, the creation of a two-tier system and the high administrative costs of running purchasing on a practice-by-practice basis.

Primary care is the jewel in the crown of the NHS. It is what enables us to achieve a relatively high health status for the population at a lower cost than any other advanced industrial country. That was brought home to me vividly after the previous election, when I visited Washington DC. I visited a number of private and public—in US terms, state-funded—hospitals, one of which was the notorious DC general hospital, a public hospital dealing with patients who did not have the money or the insurance cover to go for private care. In some ways, I was surprised by what I saw, because it looked very much like a workaday NHS district general hospital. The level and quality of care seemed similar. It was not as plush as the private hospitals, but it provided a high quality of clinical care.

The difference between the United States system and the United Kingdom system was brought home to me starkly when I was shown the maternity ward. I was staggered that the majority of patients in the ward—who had given birth a day or two before—had received no antenatal care whatever. They had simply gone into labour and gone to the public hospital. Inevitably, that results in the United States having higher perinatal and infant mortality rates, despite spending more than twice as much of its national wealth on health care as we do. We have achieved more with the primary-care-supported NHS than the US has been able to achieve.

It was equally shocking and surprising that the only patients discharged from that maternity ward with any post-natal health care provided by the public system were mothers who were deemed to be "at risk". "At risk mothers" in Washington DC fell largely into two categories—homeless parents and drug addict parents. Almost by definition, those two groups, although entitled to post-natal health services, would not get them because nobody could trace where they had gone following their discharge.

When the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) opened the debate, it was clear that—although there are some sharp differences between the two main parties—there is substantial agreement on much in the Bill. My hon. Friends and I support the measures that seek to improve the distribution and quality of primary health care services.

I ask the House to consider this: we all talk and have done for a number of years about the importance of a primary-care-led national health service, but we need to be clear what we mean by that. We need to be clear about who does the leading—is it GPs or is it nurses? Who, in primary care, are the leaders? By what means do they lead? Do they lead solely by placing contracts and by controlling the money for primary and secondary care, or by using the research base of effective innovation and clinical practice? Above all, where are they leading the NHS?

The Government have a national health strategy—"The Health of the Nation" strategy—which specifies goals towards which they want the NHS and public policy in

general to lead the nation. In this debate and in subsequent debates in Committee, we need to establish whether the Bill will give the Secretary of State—whoever occupies that position in future—the power to ensure that the leaders of the NHS in primary care are leading towards goals that he or she, as Secretary of State, and the House, as guardian of public resources, want achieved. There must be a line of accountability for primary care.

It has been said for many years that there is a striking inequality in the distribution of resources for primary care. Some months ago, I asked the Library to check in respect of each health authority how many GPs were provided in relation to the population served. The figures range from one GP for every 1,661 patients in the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority area and one for every 1,702 patients in the Isle of Wight to, at the other extreme, one GP for 2,218 in Wigan and one for 2,253 in Rotherham. In other words, Cornwall and the Isle of Wight get substantially more GPs per patient than Wigan or Rotherham, so GPs in Cornwall have substantially more time per patient and more time per consultation.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bayley: I can see the hon. Gentleman shaking his head—he or any other hon. Member is welcome to intervene, but those are the figures prepared by the Library, whose staff will dig out the same information for him if he wants it. *[Interruption.]* I cannot hear what he is saying, but he should either get up and contribute to the debate or keep quiet.

In my intervention on the Secretary of State's speech, I made it clear that I welcome the fact that the cash limits exposition booklet, which sets out for next year the basis on which the Government intend to fund the NHS for both secondary and primary care, will start to redistribute resources for primary care more equitably around the country. The effect, over time, may be that the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly health authority, as a result of Government policy, gets relatively fewer GPs per head of population and that Wigan and Rotherham get relatively more. I was, however, pleased to hear the Secretary of State's commitment that there would be no cut in absolute terms to GP provision in any part of the country and that growth money should be used to iron out the inequalities.

In October 1995, the Centre for Health Economics at the university of York produced a report on the issue of equity in primary care. It concluded that the allocation of funding and the distribution of the work force in primary care is extremely unequal in England and suggested that the Government should introduce an allocation based on the population served and its health needs. The centre estimated at that time—some two years ago—that, if resources were allocated according to population and need, the North West region would receive 447 additional GPs and the Northern and Yorkshire region would receive 311, while the South and West region had, according to the centre's calculations, 356 more GPs than its fair allocation.

In May 1996, a private sector company, North-West Surveys and Research, produced a similar piece of work, which estimated that an equitable distribution of resources for primary care would shift 700 GPs from the area south of a line drawn between the Wash and the Severn to the area north of that line. However, I stress that it is a question not only of shifting resources from north to south, but of shifting resources within health authorities and regions in the south and north, so that the provision of primary health care in every locality and community meets the needs of the population.

The introduction of a needs-based allocation for primary care is, as I said, a welcome development. The principle is right, although I believe that the methodology that the Government have adopted is wrong. The initial targets set for allocations in years to come in the cash limits exposition booklet produced for next year's allocations show that the historical allocation, which was based on demand for and utilisation of services in the past, reveals a sharp mismatch with need. For example, the two health regions with the poorest financial allocation in years past—indeed, next year as well, because they still lag behind and will not catch up in one year—are the two health regions with the highest score for "underprivileged area status" in the public health common data set; and the two best funded regions are the two with the lowest score for underprivilege.

The figures also show that the two regions that are the most poorly funded for primary care have stillbirth rates that are higher than the national average; and the two regions that are best funded per head of population for primary care have a lower stillbirth rate than the national average. It is a case of those who have will receive more and those who have not will receive less.

That has been the historical situation, but the Government have addressed the problem and have taken a small, but welcome, step in next year's allocation, to move towards an equitable distribution of resources. As I said, the principle is right, but the methodology is wrong—perhaps not entirely wrong, but wrong in significant respects. For example, the actual cash allocation next year for non-cash-limited general medical services per patient—or, to be strictly accurate, per resident—in the Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster health authority area is £21.49, which is the highest cash amount for any health authority; whereas the lowest cash amount for any health authority is in South Staffordshire, where residents receive £13.69 per head.

One would think therefore that, when a needs-based allocation was introduced, Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster health authority, over time, would receive less per patient for primary care and that South Staffordshire health authority would get more. That assumption, however, could not be more wrong. Under the Government's needs-based allocation formula, Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster, despite the fact that it already gets more per resident than any other health authority in the country, is deemed to be the most underfunded health authority in the country. When it finally reaches its target, it will receive, at current prices, £5.36 per patient on top of the £21 or so that it already receives—20 per cent. more in real terms—whereas South Staffordshire health authority, currently receiving the lowest funding per resident of any health authority, will receive only 92p per patient more.

The principal reason for that anomaly—and it is an anomaly, which needs to be corrected—is the way in which the Government have applied what they call their market forces factor. The principle of reflecting wage costs in inner London and the south-east and the cost of premises in inner London and the south-east in the

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funding formula is right, but I do not accept that the gearing—the amount of extra weighting—that Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster gets, which is 36 per cent. extra money under the market forces factor part of the formula, is appropriate to its needs. Its funding for primary care, already the highest of any health authority, will increase by a larger percentage than will the funding of any other health authority. The needs-based capitation formula for cash-limited general medical services should be revised to reflect need more sharply.

I want to discuss not only the quantity of resources available for primary care, but the quality of primary care. The hon. Member for High Peak spoke about the importance of the NHS efficiency index, but the efficiency index measures the quantity of care provided, whereas we need instead a quality index—perhaps we should call it an effectiveness index. Little or nothing in the Bill will address the issue of clinical outcomes: the extent to which primary care treatments work—the extent to which they make patients better, or better able to live with a disease or the disability that they have.

It is essential for us to develop measures to address issues that are being debated in the health service, such as skill mix—arguments about which clinical activities should appropriately be done by GPs and which by practice nurses. Should nurses prescribe? Should they do an initial screening and consult patients before patients see a doctor in general practice?

There are arguments for and against, but we should take decisions on the basis of the clinical effectiveness of a nurse intervention or a GP intervention in similar situations. One will find that in some cases a nurse can provide as good a clinical outcome as a GP and, if that is the case, one should redraw the boundary and allow a nurse to undertake that primary care activity. However, we need evidence of the effect on the patient—of the clinical outcome.

Most of the work on outcomes has been done in secondary care. In some ways, it is easier to do it there because, as doctors and other clinical workers in secondary care are direct employees of the NHS, one can to a limited extent require them to do clinical audit. That is much harder in primary care, where primary care practitioners are currently independent contractors, and it may become harder still if the job of providing primary care services and GP services as envisaged in the Bill is contracted out to private, commercial operations.

Nine out of 10 consultations between doctor and patient take place within primary care, so we need a great deal more work on the effectiveness of those consultations, and we need to establish lines of accountability that will allow the NHS, which is buying the care, to ensure that high-quality care is provided by primary care clinicians.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I am interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman says. People in secondary care have not been compelled to audit their care outcomes—far from it. The royal colleges have of their own volition gone into the field very heavily. The hon. Gentleman probably knows that my father is involved in the biggest project: the confidential inquiry into perioperative death. That was a voluntary activity; it has been enormously successful.

The hon. Gentleman is now talking about how one measures outcomes in primary care. That will be much easier to do in future because, first, many more fundholding general practices are introducing information collection technology in the form of new computers, and secondly, the Government are funding several projects throughout the country, such as the one on Teesside, which are specifically aimed at measuring outcomes in primary care. I think that the hon. Gentleman will find—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order.

Mr. Devlin:—that the problem will be solved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Devlin: I have finished.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should have finished a while ago. He is fully aware, with his experience in the House, that interventions should be brief and to the point.

Mr. Devlin: It was.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair did not think it was; otherwise it would not have intervened.

Mr. Bayley: Although it is true that clinical audit has been driven by the royal colleges, the thing that made it take off was the fact that the NHS agreed to provide a certain proportion of paid clinical time—I believe a session a month—to enable it to happen. It was possible for the NHS to do that in relation to secondary care. It is much harder to do it in relation to primary care.

Admittedly, as information technology becomes increasingly available in primary care, the capture of the data needed for a clinical audit will be easier, but I do not agree with the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) that that has come about as a result of GP fundholding. It has come about as a result of Government investment in information technology in primary care. We need to ensure that that provision is made equally and fairly in all general practices, irrespective of status.

I have received complaints from non-fundholding practices in my constituency not only that they are unable to obtain as much grant as is given to fundholders, but that they are unable to obtain support for the information technology that they need to improve and develop their clinical practice. That is wrong. The technology is needed in all practices.

Technology used in different practices should be compatible, because data collected using incompatible systems are impossible to audit across the locality. To me at least, that emphasises the need to ensure that the NHS, albeit without heavy central direction, is driving forward the audit process in primary care. If it does not, dozens of different computer systems will be used among the various practices, and it will be impossible to assess the effect of clinical interventions across localities and from one health authority or region to another. We need to be able to do so if we are to drive up standards of clinical care.

The amount of good, solid information about effective clinical practice in primary care is pretty small compared with secondary care. Through their NHS research and

development programme, the Government are supporting the centre for reviews and dissemination at the university of York. It has produced a number of clinical practice guidelines, only three of which relate to practice in primary care—the guidelines on cholesterol screening and on the prescription of anti-depressants, and the controversial guidelines on prostate cancer screening, which were published last week. Most of the guidance on good clinical practice relates to secondary care, and we need to develop a greater emphasis on evidence-based medicine in primary care.

The Select Committee on Health, in its report on purchasing, recommended that GP fundholders should be required to submit a clinical practice plan to their health authority each year before receiving their budget. I am sad to say that that recommendation was rejected out of hand by the Government. The Labour party addressed the Select Committee's proposal in its policy on commissioning.

I presume that the Bill, if enacted, will require quality thresholds and outcomes to be built into contracts for bought-in primary care services, otherwise the purchaser would be buying a pig in a poke. When a health authority is purchasing care from a secondary care provider, it establishes standards and quality thresholds in the contract. If that is to apply to contracted-in primary care services, the Government will have to develop mechanisms to ensure quality control. Such mechanisms should be applied throughout primary care, whether provided by traditional, non-fundholding practices, fundholding practices or the new contracted-in practices.

I hope that the Minister will address that issue in winding up or later in Committee, and I hope that the Government will be able to give us some answers.

7.1 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I especially like the Bill's flexibility and its imaginative approach to pilot schemes, which those at the sharp end of health care may wish to adopt. I am, as the House is possibly tired of hearing, fortunate in my constituency in having forward-looking GPs. In fact, I cannot think offhand of any aspect of health care in which Lancaster does not excel. I may be biased, but our new premises mean that it is getting better all the time. Many of my local GPs, who were among the first fundholders, have extended the services they offer their patients almost beyond belief. I am sure that they will be happy to introduce pilot schemes to extend their services still further, because that is especially important in a country area.

Not all new ideas, which seem fine on paper or in the first flush of enthusiasm, will work in practice. One of the strengths of the Bill is that if a pilot scheme is not as good as first hoped, it can be terminated and the practice involved can return to the status quo without penalty or humiliation. That means that practices will be more willing to start pilot schemes than if they thought they could not get out of them.

The elderly often look back longingly at the old cottage hospitals. Time lends enchantment, but they were delightful places. I vividly remember that we used to hold sewing bees for the hospitals and mend all the sheets. We put our hearts and souls into those hospitals, but nobody could pretend that they were high-tech. They were supported by the whole community, but they could not supply the sophisticated care that is now required.

The rapidly expanding health centres that are springing up all around the country are able to provide a range of services. They are, in effect, modern versions of the cottage hospital. The pilot schemes will enable health centres to extend the range of services that they provide, which is very important in an isolated rural area. The speed of the changes in the primary care sector is astonishing. Only a few years ago, it was unheard of for consultants to stray from their hospitals and leave the barrier of their entourages and consulting rooms. Now, many consultants attend doctors' surgeries, to the great benefit of patients. Again, that innovation is especially important in scattered areas where not everybody has a car. It is marvellous that people can go to their local health centres and be seen by a consultant; it also cuts waiting times.

Another strength of the Bill is that the pilot schemes will not be able to drag on. They will be carefully assessed within a time limit of three years. Nothing is worse than a pilot scheme that drags on and on, with nobody knowing whether it is a success or when it will end.

Not every area is as fortunate as mine. Inner cities still face severe problems. Sometimes I have to remind my constituents that the Government run services not only for Lancaster but for the whole country, and the Bill will provide for less fortunate areas. It will enable medical practices and community trusts to employ doctors in salaried posts. Many young single doctors may be willing—as a social service, to repay the training they have had and to do their duty by those less fortunate than themselves—to serve in a difficult inner-city area, but the need to invest in premises and to enter a long-term commitment to a partnership can be a frightening deterrent. Doctors who have worked for only four or five years may be able to fill a serious gap in areas that are now almost barren of doctors.

The pilot projects may also push forward the boundaries of the care and advice that can be given by nurses and trained pharmacists. The way in which we use our pharmacists is a scandalous waste of talent and training. On the continent, pharmacists provide advice: they are almost as good as doctors and, in many ways, are better. That does not happen in this country and it must be very frustrating for highly trained pharmacists to spend so much of their lives just dishing out pills. They are capable of giving a wide range of advice and the pilot projects should take advantage of their expertise.

The same applies to nurses. In the past two or three years the range of services that nurses can offer has gradually widened, sometimes unofficially. Again, pilot projects could extend that range still further. It is a waste of talent and enthusiasm if we train someone highly and then do not use them to the utmost. The Bill will help us to do that.

7.8 pm

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): I have spent the past 35 years in medical practice in inner-city west Belfast, so I have listened carefully to the debate this afternoon, especially to the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). More and more people in the higher income brackets are turning to private medicine, whether we like it or not.

If the Bill becomes law and eventually, by Order in Council, applies to Northern Ireland, the important question for me and for those I represent will be how it

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applies to people in inner-city areas and to people who are deprived. We all remember the Black report a few years ago on inequalities in health care. It was an important report, but it was shelved. People refer to it from time to time, but it was not taken seriously by the Government at the time.

I pay tribute to all those involved in primary health care. As every hon. Member accepts, it is a magnificent service provided by well trained people. The standard among general practitioners today is probably the highest in the history of medicine. I pay tribute to all members of the primary care team. Much has been said about community nurses. The Bill refers to nurse-led pilot schemes, and I would certainly support them.

For years, nurses in the United States have played an important role. I accept what the hon. Member for Lancaster said about wasted talent, referring to nurses and pharmacists. They are highly trained people. In the United States, nurses have the authority to give out certain drugs. There is no reason why that should not apply in the United Kingdom.

That is equally true of pharmacists. People in deprived and inner-city areas ask the pharmacist for advice, but that should be put on a proper footing. I know that the Bill deals with that.

Social workers and health visitors are all worth their weight in gold. I want to say a special word about the psychiatric nurse. In the communities, the community psychiatrist plays an important role, but the pivotal role is played by the psychiatric nurse. That is the person to whom a GP would first refer a patient with a mental health problem, and later perhaps to the psychiatrist.

No hon. Member has referred to the role of occupational therapists. If the Bill becomes law, its application in inner-city areas could give rise to a major problem in regard to occupational therapists and housing. The GP or the primary care team may be concerned about a patient with disabilities, but there may be a waiting list of six months or a year for recommended modifications to be made to the patient's home, such as the installation of a stair lift. I also find that what the patient wants, and what the occupational therapist and housing executive agree, sometimes differ widely.

I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's speech. He spoke about the flexible approach to contracts. No one would disagree with that. I accept the general principle of pilot schemes. We are tied down by day-to-day work in general practice, but the biggest handicap for general medical practitioners is the increased administrative work that they have to do. They are trained to treat patients. I shall not go into the question of fundholders versus non-fundholders, but administration and administrative staff seem to be increasing, not decreasing.

The Secretary of State spoke about the evaluation of pilot schemes, which is essential. There are many aspects to pilot schemes. Although I have studied the Bill carefully, there are many aspects that I do not fully comprehend. I appreciate that regulations will be issued after the Bill becomes law.

The Secretary of State said that the Medical Practices Committee would be given a statutory right to be consulted. I hope that that will be meaningful consultation.

Many Opposition Members are concerned about commercialisation, and I share their concern. When we talk about flexibility, do we also mean privatisation? I would be worried about that.

The question of health authorities employing a GP has been discussed. Earlier we heard reference to a hospital trust employing a GP. If that GP is a fundholder, a distinct conflict of interests could arise.

When the time comes, I will judge the Bill in relation to inner-city and deprived areas. I hope that it will be amended to build in certain safeguards to protect the quality of primary care. Mention has been made of the quality of primary care, as opposed to the extent or the cost of the care. The quality of the care is important.

The family doctor service must remain fully within the national health service, and not be open to direct or indirect privatisation. GPs will oppose provisions in the Bill that would allow private companies to be involved in running the family doctor service. GPs must be free to be advocates on behalf of their patients and to exercise independent clinical judgment. The Secretary of State, I think, quoted Dr. Bogle of the British Medical Association, who said that there must be no third party in the consulting room. No one would argue with that.

I have read the Labour amendment with care and would accept its main points—that the Bill

"fails to require health authorities to consult with patients and professional groups on pilot projects"

and that it

"fails to provide for nurses and other primary care professionals to participate fully in pilot projects".

Reference was made earlier to pilot schemes and the single-handed doctor, and the quality of such a doctor. I would support that approach. We heard that, if an advertisement had been placed three times and no suitable candidate found, the post would be frozen. If a practice became available, perhaps because a single-handed doctor had died, the local authority would advertise for a doctor, but the committee might not think that the quality of an applicant was good enough, so that person would not be appointed. I point out that the practice size would dwindle day by day, as people went to other doctors. I have seen many examples of that. It is important that a proper doctor is appointed and that there are incentives for such a person to go into that area.

I have some criticism of certain bodies—GPs are no more perfect than anyone else. In some cases, doctors from other practices sit on the committee and decide who should or should not be appointed to the single-handed practice. It might be in the interest of those doctors that no one was appointed, so that the patients would go on to other doctors' lists. The question of viability arises; the practice might simply disappear. I do not know the position in Great Britain, but that has happened many times in Northern Ireland. Many things happen in Northern Ireland, however.

Independent monitoring schemes are important, as is the training of young doctors. I see the GPs of today as the best ever. I was a trainer myself in medical practice, and I had nothing but admiration for the young doctors who came into our health centre—extremely able young men and women. Standards are rising all the time. The problem is that as the administrative arrangements increase, doctors must spend more and more time on administration, and therefore less time with patients.

We can all pay tribute to paramedics, especially anyone who has been at the scene of a road traffic accident and seen the efficiency of paramedics in action. However, it must be said that some are not trained in such matters. It seems that, if anyone puts on a big coat with something written on the back to the effect that he is a paramedic, everyone steps aside to let him in. There must be protection for the public in that regard.

The Government must consult every member of the primary care team—not just general practitioners, but nurses, social workers and health visitors or their representatives. I am not sure how the Government will do that, but it is obviously extremely important. I have read the British Medical Association briefing document for today's debate and, like that organisation, I would be concerned about the involvement of private companies in the running of the NHS family doctor service.

The criteria for assessing the value of pilot schemes must be clearly defined. GPs working on pilot schemes should be represented through their recognised local medical committees. Such committees are statutory bodies, and therefore proper, full and meaningful consultation should take place with them. We have already referred to the fact that pilot schemes would be voluntary, so I shall not re-examine the issues involved.

The question of salaried GPs has arisen many times over the years. Doctors have different views on the subject, but the Bill puts the case for salaried general practitioners. I mentioned the problem of replacing doctors in inner-city areas while patient numbers remain viable. In such circumstances, salaried positions might appeal to some doctors who would like to be freed from the administrative detail associated with running a business. Doctors are not trained in business, and many would like to concentrate solely on patient care. There is a role for a salaried service, but it should not be introduced across the board.

I accept that funding is limited. The noble Baroness Thatcher said, "You can't solve every problem by throwing money at it." We accept that general point, but funding is very different for fundholders and non-fundholders. I am not sure that fundholding always benefits patients. I accept that many doctors opted for fundholding initially because they believed that it would serve their patients' best interests. However, I am unhappy about certain aspects of fundholding.

I appreciate that the Bill deals with England, Scotland and Wales and does not apply to Northern Ireland. However, if it becomes law, it will be extended to Northern Ireland by an Order in Council. Some doctors in Northern Ireland who applied to become fundholders were not accepted on financial grounds, although their practices were organised and fully computerised.

Mr. Robathan: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's comments with interest. Having regard to his own experience as a GP in west Belfast, does he not think that improvements could be made? It is all very well to claim that fundholding has led to discrimination, but does he not think that we should make progress? Does he agree that fundholding has proved generally beneficial to practices that have selected that option, and that we should proceed down that road rather than saying, "Fundholding is discriminatory and some practices are not doing so well"? We should encourage all practices to do better.

Dr. Hendron: Fundholding will work only if all doctors become fundholders and if we have an equitable system for doctors and patients. I do not have the figures for fundholding and non-fundholding GPs in Northern Ireland. I did not agree with the principle of fundholding when it was introduced, but it is here to stay so there is no point arguing about the fundamentals. The system will work properly only if all doctors are fundholders—no one can deny that fact. In Belfast, the patients of fundholding GPs are often treated first while those of non-fundholders remain on the waiting list. That is wrong.

I pay tribute to the Royal College of General Practitioners, which has played a major role in elevating general practice within the national health service in the past 20 years. Some 20 or 25 years ago, doctors used to make jokes about general practitioners. That does not occur any more, and the standard of general practice is very high. We have some difficulties encouraging doctors to train in that area, but that is an extremely complex problem that I cannot explore now.

I am honoured to be a member of the Royal College of General Practitioners. It believes that standards of care must be maintained, that it is important to retain central elements of the existing system and that people must have universal free access to general practitioners. Continuity of care is a key point. In order to maintain quality of care, we should establish a proper process that will enable trusts and local health authorities to appoint GPs. Almost all general practitioners have completed vocational training satisfactorily—90 per cent. of practising doctors have passed the Royal College of General Practitioners examination. I support the Bill's general concepts, although I have expressed some serious reservations.

7.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I apologise to the House for not being present for the beginning of the debate. My absence was due partly to my busy schedule and partly to the fact that I went to look at a school for my son, who is now nine weeks old. Like most people in their early or mid-forties, I have not had great experience of the national health service. However, I recently experienced its primary care services at first-hand with the birth of my son. I was extremely impressed, as was my wife—which is perhaps more important—with the service provided.

My wife received excellent pre-natal care from her GP and from the hospital. During the delivery at St. Thomas's hospital—I shall briefly digress from primary care provision—two midwives, a doctor, a senior registrar, a paediatrician and an anaesthetist were present in the delivery room. I was proud to be known as a Conservative MP, just in case some of the staff were not particularly happy about it. However, I discovered later that one midwife had trained in Leicester at the time of the last election and had voted for me—which is a feather in my cap. My wife and son received excellent treatment, which was very reassuring.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): Another victory for Labour.

Mr. Robathan: No, it is not. Since the delivery, my wife has received post-natal care, and the standard of

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NHS at-home care is also excellent. Initially, a midwife called every day, and now my son is seen by a GP or a health visitor every other week. A tremendous range of services are available—I think that my son is due to have his injections on Thursday—and the treatment is first-class.

I cite that personal experience because it has given my wife and I great confidence in the NHS and in its primary care provision. Our experience counter-balances the stories that one reads from time to time—which usually appear in the cheaper press—claiming that NHS treatment is not good. Primary care—which I hope will benefit from the pilot schemes mentioned in the Bill—should aim to prevent disease and maintain health standards. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health will refer to that point in his winding-up speech.

Primary care is about general health and fitness. That is not to say that we want a nanny state to determine the fitness or health of every individual. The *Evening Standard* refers to an advertisement for eggs with runny egg yolks, and says that some people are already complaining about it because those are bad for us. With all due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie), those of us who like our egg yolks runny do not need the state to tell us, in the cause of prevention, that they are bad for us.

I do not want a nanny state, but I would like a greater concentration on health and fitness promotion. Leicestershire health authority is to be congratulated on the information that it provides, even if it sometimes strays a little towards the nanny state.

Being a 45-year-old male, and having had very little medical treatment during my life, I am a classic example of a person who does not often use primary care or the NHS until the age of 50. Apparently, from the age of 55 I will become a bit of a liability to my GP and to the health service as a whole. That is the usual pattern: if one is fortunate enough to be healthy, one does not use health care services until one is about 55.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): My hon. Friend demeans himself, because he is one of the more energetic Members of the House. He is well known for riding his bicycle. I feel sure that the first time that he will have any real involvement with the NHS will be at the age of 65, rather than 55.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I rather hope that I will stay out of hospital altogether, as I sometimes feel shaky at the knees just walking into a hospital.

We have seen the Government's White Paper, "The Health of the Nation", and we have seen the way in which local health authorities pursue preventive measures: it could be called health encouragement. My hon. Friend mentioned cycling. If children walked or cycled to school, they would remain healthier. I am sure that the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), who was a general practitioner, would agree with me that we must encourage our children to be fit and healthy. The discouragement of competitive sport in school has made children less willing to take to the playing fields, but I am glad to see that the Department for Education and Employment is now putting that right.

Gyms are a flourishing commodity around London and elsewhere: there is one in the House of Commons, and one nearby, which I use. The use of gyms shows that people are concerned about their health. By staying healthy and fit, they reduce the burden on the NHS. I have seen reports that GPs may now be able to prescribe courses at gymnasiums for their unfit patients.

Being healthy and fit starts at school. Health promotion in schools can be particularly useful, especially in primary schools. I went to a primary school in my constituency on Friday. I saw the lunches that the children were bringing from home instead of having the lunches provided by the school. They must have been just as expensive as the £1.15 that the school charges for lunch, but they contained food that was not the most healthy.

Mrs. Mahon: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher, was responsible for abolishing nutritional aspects of school meals?

Mr. Robathan: I recall hearing the chant, "Maggie Thatcher, milk snatcher" in the High street at Oxford when I was at university. Free milk in schools can still be obtained. I also remember that milk used to be delivered to our school.

Mrs. Mahon: Milk is nutritional.

Mr. Robathan: Yes. It was delivered to our school, but it was always tepid and no one drank it. Many of those third-pints of milk were taken away undrunk, because no one liked the stuff. The hon. Lady is right in that we should encourage a greater nutritional content in school meals. I think that we agree entirely on that.

If health professionals and teachers develop an awareness in schoolchildren of the importance of eating the right food, and not just crisps and chocolate, less of a burden will be placed on primary health care.

People in Leicestershire are concerned about air quality. Air quality in London, Leicester or wherever affects the number of asthmatics who go to their doctors or have to attend hospitals. We should examine this problem, and take a holistic approach to health care and prevention. If we could reduce the pollution in our cities, fewer children and others would go to their doctors. I am keen for some of the pilot schemes proposed in the Bill to work hand in hand with other agencies towards that end, and I hope that something along those lines will be discussed in Committee.

Fundholding is growing in popularity. Doctors in Blaby have said to me that they do not like fundholding, but the next year they have decided to become fundholders because of the benefits, and the following year they have said that there are also benefits for their patients. As I said to the hon. Member for Belfast, West, that is how to make progress. We must ensure that the service is getting better, and that improvements are always being made.

I recently went with my wife, who was then pregnant, to a fundholding surgery in Blaby. It was a bit of an emergency: my wife was concerned. We went there at short notice—we are not registered with that practice, because we are registered in London. We received excellent treatment. I say to those who knock fundholding practices, "What were things like 30 years ago? Indeed,

what were they like 18 years ago?" The treatment that one receives in a national health surgery is better than it was before, and one should think back before criticising and harping on about what may not always be perfect now.

Two fundholding surgeries in my constituency—a health centre in Blaby and one in Countesthorpe—have recently installed ECG machines. The Blaby Lions organised sponsored walks to raise the money for those machines. I see no reason why local people should not help raise money for local health centres. I should pat myself on the back, because I took part in both sponsored walks, although I did not complete one of them.

If we were to abolish GP fundholding, as some Opposition Members want—I am not sure about members of the Opposition Front Bench, who seem to vary slightly—what would we lose? What facilities would we lose? What freedom to employ additional staff and to use alternative treatments would we lose? From my limited personal experience, I think that we would lose a great deal.

We should also consider the rising expectations of patients. Patients are no longer happy to put up with the grotty GP surgeries that they have perhaps had to put up with in the past. One may say that patient expectations are too high, but I do not agree. We should expect decent, well-run, clean surgeries, with the latest equipment if possible. We should be working towards achieving that where it does not exist.

Patients must also take responsibility for their own primary health care. If a heavy smoker—this also relates to health promotion—is not given all the treatment that he wants, we should say to him, "Surely you too are responsible for your health, not just the doctor or the hospital. You are responsible for looking after yourself." Otherwise, we become a nanny state that says to people, "Whatever you do, we will look after you," and I do not think that that is right.

I went to the casualty department at St. Thomas's hospital with my young son just before Christmas—treatment in casualty is primary health care. I was appalled by what the excellent staff of the hospital had to put up with on a Thursday evening before Christmas. It was quite shocking. I shall not be too rude about the people, except to say that they were drunks, layabouts and louts, and were being extremely rude to one another and to the staff. We should tell them that they are responsible for what happens to them, especially those who were dripping with blood, having fallen over in drunken stupors. As many doctors have pointed out to me, those are the same people who call doctors out in the middle of the night to say that they have a bit of a sore throat. We must make individuals more responsible for their own primary health care.

Linked to that is the question of compensation. I hope that, in Committee, we shall consider giving more protection against vexatious litigation. Once, when someone fell ill, the standard cry would go up, "Is there a doctor in the house?" I fear that we are now approaching the situation that exists in America, where doctors pass by on the other side because they are frightened of being sued. That is dangerous: doctors who have taken the Hippocratic oath, and are interested in the well-being of their fellow man, should not be subject to that fear.

Leicester is fortunate in having three general hospitals—Leicester royal infirmary, Glenfield hospital and Leicester general hospital. All have good reputations, and a great deal of money has been spent on them recently; but a project is now under way to establish whether it would be better to concentrate the care that they provide on two sites. I shall not comment on whether that would be desirable, because I am not a health professional. I shall say, however, that I think it right to allow the professionals who are most closely involved—surgeons, consultants, nurses and managers: those who must provide the care—a decent say. I regret to say that at least one Labour Member representing Leicester has said that that is wrong. We should view the position in its entirety, and consider what is best for the people of Leicester.

While it has been increasingly difficult to obtain dental care on the NHS in the recent past, I am delighted to note that it now seems to be becoming easier. Not long ago I registered with an NHS dentist in Leicestershire, and, although it is true that one has to wait for a while for treatment, I commend the dentist who has treated me on several occasions. I suspect that the cost of crowning two teeth was relatively inexpensive. People say that NHS dentists are useless, but I was able to sign up with that dentist in an emergency, and he has given me excellent treatment.

One provision in the Bill aims to reduce bureaucracy—I am sure that we would all welcome that—by unifying health budgets and making contracts easier. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, people have complained that the growth of GP fundholding and other reforms have led to an increase in paperwork. Part of that may have been necessary, but I think that we should consider carefully how we can reduce it to the minimum.

I welcome the Bill. I believe that it is another step towards improving primary health care—and we all want the best primary health care for our constituents.

7.43 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Although I support the amendment, I am not denying that there are good things in the Bill, such as the new rules for appointing GPs in single-handed practices, and the provision of salaried GPs. I am glad that community trusts will be able to employ GPs, although, like others who have spoken, I am very worried about the acute trusts. I fear that there could be a blurring of the purchaser-provider split, and even—as the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) suggested—a conflict of interests in regard to GPs who might be employed as fundholders.

The Secretary of State outlined some of the good aspects of pilot schemes—for instance, the fact that permanent arrangements will not be introduced unless they have been agreed by the Secretary of State. There must be proper assessment, but there is some doubt about who will carry it out. Participation is to be voluntary, but I wonder whether sweeteners will be offered in some instances. Participants must be given an assurance that they can return to current practice if the alternative does not prove satisfactory, and I welcome most of the proposed arrangements. I feel, however, that we need clarification in regard to who will be consulted.

As I said to the Secretary of State in an intervention, past consultation has left some of us less than enamoured of the practice. I mentioned a recent consultation exercise relating to a 300-bed reduction. I do not know whether we shall ever get our new hospital in Halifax—which is

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

being built under the now infamous private finance initiative—but there has been plenty of consultation about it, and not a blind bit of notice has been taken of any of those who have been consulted. As the winter has gone on, it has become clear that we can hardly manage with the beds that we have now. I hope that the nurse-led pilot schemes will be allowed to continue; I should like to see much more detail in that regard.

The Secretary of State said that primary care should be a friend to patients, but I think that the Bill fails on a number of counts. There are one or two missed opportunities. The question of commercialisation is, I believe, still there. The last link has not been fractured; it is still in the original proposals. It seems to me that the Secretary of State is pandering to the Tory right in his bid for the leadership, which may have clouded his judgment a little and led him into what is essentially another attempt—in at least one part of the Bill—to take more privatisation to the heart of the national health service.

Let me say a little about GPs and the primary care system. Although that system is envied by most of the developed world, we should not overlook the fact that we are facing a crisis. That crisis is best summed up by the British Medical Association, which recently stated:

"GP morale is at its lowest ebb for many years, caused by excessive workload, the continuing out of hours burden, too much bureaucracy and falling remuneration relative to comparable professions".

Those are the BMA's words, not mine.

I know—as do all other hon. Members, if they are honest with themselves—that that statement is true. Only last week, along with other Labour members of the parliamentary Yorkshire group—a fairly large group—I met doctors from the Yorkshire region. Dr. David Smith, a GP, told us that the GP service was in crisis. It was failing to recruit. Patients' expectations had been greatly raised by developments in treatments, but there had been a doubling in night work, and a massive transfer of work from secondary to primary care that had not been properly funded. Many people have overlooked that.

Mr. Spring: Will the hon. Lady draw a distinction between the morale, as she puts it, of GPs who are in fundholding practices and that of GPs who are not? Following correspondence and conversations with GPs who have entered into fundholding arrangements, I have the clear impression that morale is very high. Those doctors are able to offer a range of services that their patients appreciate, and can raise quality by being able to send patients to the right hospitals for the right treatment. Labour's policies, if implemented, would remove that benefit.

Mrs. Mahon: The opposite is true. Commissioning would allow all GPs to offer services without added bureaucracy and paperchases.

Dr. Smith and his colleagues also confirmed what we already knew: that equity in care is not a reality. He told us that many GPs had overspent in the past two years keeping fundholding practices, that a two-tier system was developing and that the internal market in health had led to a paperchase. I have many local examples, but I want to refer to one involving Glenfield hospital. This example might interest the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). I have raised this matter before in the House with the Secretary of State.

A constituent of mine who has been waiting 15 months for a heart bypass operation and who should have gone to Leeds general infirmary but cannot because it has stopped doing elective surgery, has been offered an operation at the Glenfield cardiac care unit in Leicester, but the letter states clearly that it has stopped doing elective surgery except for the patients of GP fundholders in Leicester, so here is a classic example of a two-tier system in his constituency. However, my constituent, who should be going to Leeds general infirmary, can go to Glenfield and jump in front of non-fundholders' patients, regardless of clinical urgency. It is not worst first; it is who can pay.

Mr. Robathan: There is, of course, a question of funding. As I think the hon. Lady will understand, the whole NHS requires funding and is enormously expensive. I think that she will find that she is incorrect. I have not of course read the letter. There are three general hospitals in Leicester, all of which offer excellent care. I should say that Glenfield offers particularly good care in cardiac surgery because it has some of the latest, most expensive state-of-the-art technology that she will ever have seen.

Mrs. Mahon: I checked this matter with the administrators, and it is absolutely true. I was looking after the interests of my constituent, and he can have the operation in weeks at Glenfield rather than waiting months for the operation to take place in Leeds.

If the Bill is passed without amendment, the present two-tier system will continue. Patients will carry on being treated on the basis not of need, but of other factors: age, where they live, who their GP is and what status he has. Patients will come well down the list of priorities.

The increase in the number of patients who are being struck off doctors' lists will continue, and that worries me. The Bill does not deal with that because the internal market has encouraged that increase. The trust between the doctor and the patient is threatened by the cash price factor in the internal market.

In November 1995 I introduced a ten-minute Bill to deal with that very problem. I suggested what I consider were modest proposals. At some stage during the passage of this Bill, I intend to table an amendment to try to get the proposals in my Bill written into it. Patients should know at the very least why they have been struck off a doctor's list. Practices are becoming increasingly large. Before such a drastic step is taken, there should be discussion between doctors on whether another doctor can take the patient on board because being struck off has a devastating effect on people.

I make it absolutely clear that the amendment that I hope to introduce is not a "doctor-bashing" amendment, but just a few weeks ago in Halifax I was contacted by an elderly lady, Mrs. Mary Walker, and her husband, who had used the same practice for 47 years. I spoke to her on the telephone and arranged to see her at a later date. She was incredibly distressed that she had been struck off her doctor's list. No reason was given, and of course a doctor does not have to say why. Obviously, the family health services authority got her another doctor, but she died before I could see her. Such cases happen over and over

again, so the Government need to deal with the matter. People should at least be told why they have been taken off or offered another doctor within the same practice, because having to travel outside their region can present major problems for elderly people and for women with young children.

If I table that amendment, it will not be because I am anti-doctor. I have the highest regard for our GPs and the system. I also recognise that they have a legitimate right to say, "The relationship has broken down and I cannot treat this patient." Of course the General Medical Services Committee, in some advice a couple of years ago—which could be tightened up a little—pointed out that a patient may be struck off if there is violent or threatening behaviour towards a doctor or his family. As I have said, there could be a complete breakdown between doctor and patient. Scurrilous and unfounded allegations might be made against a doctor. There could be prescription fraud or the persistent breaking of appointments.

All those things could happen, but the Bill misses the boat. If we are really talking about patients, the Bill could have included measures on that, but it does nothing to deal with the problem. Instead it deals with what I believe is the hidden agenda of the Conservatives: if, God forbid, they ever got in again, privatisation of the NHS would be top of their list. That trend is in the Bill. The Secretary of State has just slightly pulled back from what he was going to do, but a strong link remains and it still threatens one of the abiding strengths of British primary care, that the GP's role as "patient's champion" and "gatekeeper" to the NHS. That could be undermined with this commercialisation.

That undermining of the doctor-patient relationship is destabilising and adds to the destabilisation that we have already seen with GP fundholding. The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), who intervened to talk about GP fundholding, has now left the Chamber, but I should like to have drawn his attention to *The Mail on Sunday*, which showed the downside of GP fundholding. Its article stated:

"Dr. Ian Dunn and his seven colleagues, who look after 16,000 patients in the area"—

I think it is Long Eaton, Derbyshire—

"became fundholding GPs—joining the scheme which has become the flagship of the Tory Party's NHS reforms. Theirs was one of the largest practices in the country to take over management of its own patient budget, in this case around £2.5 million a year.

Now they have been thrown out"

because the GPs have overspent their budget by £300,000. They did so because they did not want to stop patients from being treated. Therefore, there is an unravelling of that flagship.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: No. I am sorry. I must get on. Other hon. Members want to speak and the hon. Gentleman has not been in the Chamber most of the night.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) has said, even though the Government have pulled back now and there has been a little bit of a withdrawal from the commercialisation that was envisaged in the first place in the White Paper and in the Bill, many companies have shown an interest in being able to employ GPs. They include Asda, which has well-known links to the Tory party—I do not need to go over them again; they have been well expanded in the Chamber—UniChem, the United Kingdom's largest drug supplier, which has plans to build health centres and to employ GPs; and PPP Healthcare, which proposed a pilot scheme involving the provision of GP services at the company's private hospitals, with referrals to the hospitals.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who I hope votes with us tonight, said that he did not think that the location was important. It is important if it is in the same place as a private hospital and patients are referred straight there. Such hospitals do not train NHS staff. They are leeches on the back of the NHS, and the sooner we realise that, the better.

The public should be warned. The Government have back-tracked slightly on the commercialisation. Should they ever be elected again, within days, the Secretary of State for Health would introduce a Bill to bring that commercialisation and privatisation right into the heart of the NHS again.

As I have said, Labour Members welcome pilot schemes, with all the provisos and everything else. I do not think that I have been too negative. I have tried to be honest about the Bill. There are things in it that I welcome, but, if hon. Members really want to safeguard the NHS and to keep it as a national health service, they should support the reasonable reasoned amendment tonight.

7.58 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): The nice thing about speaking in this part of the evening—the "black hole" part of it—is that the Front Benchers, with one or two very odd exceptions, have gone to dinner, and it is possible to indulge in as many heresies as one likes without their knowing what has been said. I shall briefly try out one or two heresies on the House in this speech. Generally, however, we have come to praise a measure that we think has potential to do some good, although we have reservations on some matters—such as on evaluation procedures and on planning mechanisms that will remain after the Bill is passed—and questions about links with the private sector. Those reservations and questions will undoubtedly be expressed in amendments to the Bill.

As I said, we generally welcome the Bill and the Government's conversion to an approach of progress through pilot measures. However, we wonder how different the health service would have been if, some years ago, the Government had approached their reforms to the health service in the same spirit. We even forgive the Government for their use of the word "flexibility" in the Bill. Over the years, we have come to worry about their use of that word to describe health service reform, although I think that it may have some positive benefits in this context.

We particularly welcome this opportunity squarely to address the issue of quality in the health service—in a manner in which it has so far not been addressed by the Government. If Ministers had set quality as their objective in their health and education measures of the past 18 years, how different their programme would have been. If they had simply set the objective of organisational improvement instead of directing all their energies towards organisational change, how different their health and education agendas would have been.

[Dr. Tony Wright]

I was delighted last week to hear a speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on health care quality. He said:

"In Government, we will shift the balance of attention from quantity to quality."

That shift of emphasis is long overdue, and it has great, positive implications for the way in which we approach health matters.

With some reservations, therefore, I come to praise. We come to praise GPs. When people in the United Kingdom tell us that they have been to see the doctor, that they are going to see the doctor or of what the doctor has told them, they are of course talking about their general practitioner. For most people, the GP is the person who represents the health service, at close quarters and most intimately. GPs are also the gatekeepers to the secondary care system, in a system that works splendidly for most people. When the system works well, it works extremely well.

One of the heresies that I should like to suggest to hon. Members, however, is that occasionally the system does not work so well, and that one of our responsibilities is to ensure that we do something about it when and where it does not work well. If we believe that everyone in the United Kingdom—wherever they live, and to whichever part of the community they belong—has the right of access to a quality general practitioner working in quality premises with quality support, we have to say that some aspects of the current system do not work well at all. The system is not delivering that objective to many people in the most stressed and disadvantaged parts of this country.

Listening to Conservative Members, I often think that they speak for "comfortable England". It has to be spoken for, and many people are prepared to speak for it. However, some of us have a duty to speak for "uncomfortable England" and for "uncomfortable Britain". I have been speaking only about England because Conservative Members speak solely for England. In uncomfortable Britain, however, parts of the health service and of the primary health service do not work as well as they should. There is a gap between the type of service that Conservative Members speak about and the type of service experienced by the constituents of some Opposition Members. We have a duty to close that gap, and we should try to close that gap in debating and passing this legislation.

When we say "primary care", we instinctively think of general practitioners, although 90 per cent. of primary care is not delivered by GPs but by other health service professionals. That is the first uncoupling that we must perform.

We now have a primary care system that is driven by individual professionals rather than by interdisciplinary health care teams, although I think that most hon. Members think that the system should be driven by interdisciplinary care teams. The Bill presents the opportunity to move in that direction.

The question, however, is why do we not have such a system now. Why do we not have as the norm primary health care teams, particularly in those parts of the country that are most disadvantaged in health terms? Why do we not have teams of doctors, community nurses, health visitors, community midwives, pharmacists and other professionals working together on a team basis in those areas where need is greatest and where health provision is often most scant?

We know that about 30 per cent. of GP activity could be delegated to nurses without detriment to quality. Why have we not converted that insight into the way in which we deliver health care through primary health care teams? The question I am really asking—it is a type of heresy—is why do we have one system when we would benefit from having another? Why have we grown accustomed to one system—a system of individual professionals working separately—when we need interdisciplinary health care teams, particularly in those areas of greatest need?

One of the Bill's provisions gives a clue about why we have one system whereas we need another. It is the provision dealing with changing the way in which appointments to general practice are made when no satisfactory candidate presents himself or herself after three re-advertisements. People will be amazed to discover that, heretofore, we have had a system in which unsuitable candidates have been appointed simply because there have been three advertisements. Why has that been done when it was not in the public interest to do so? It was done because that is how we have organised primary care and because those who control the system—the professional bodies—have had such power inside the system.

Prompted by this Bill, I should like to ask whether the individual contractor system has worked well. Has the Medical Practice Committee—the MPC—succeeded in matching need to supply across the land? How can it have been done when some health authority areas now have a third more GPs per head of population than others? In some places, spending is almost two thirds higher than in others. If the individual contractor system—which is linked to the power of the professional bodies—had worked well, such disparities would not exist.

I can express another heresy by asking whether the system has delivered guaranteed high quality clinical care. Fortunately, in most places it has, because of the quality of most GPs, but it has not been delivered uniformly. More importantly, we do not know whether the system delivers high quality care because there are no effective procedures to monitor clinical care in general practice. That is one of the consequences of the individual contractor system. The autonomy that is part of the individual contractor system is an autonomy from effective clinical audit. Such autonomy is allowed increasingly less frequently in the secondary care sector, and it should not be allowed in the primary sector—but it has been.

One of my hopes is that, because of the advent of salaried GPs, we can begin to ensure the performance of clinical audits and to prescribe practices and to take all the other action that we knew was necessary but which we were unable to take because of the way in which the individual contractor system has worked.

I want to refer to my area, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) has reminded the House, has the lowest spend on non-cash limited primary care per head of population for any area in the country. In his annual report last year—it was an excellent report—the local director of public health pointed out that the Cannock Chase area has the highest number of

practitioners who operate singlehandedly, as well as practitioners with the largest list sizes and the highest level of secondary referrals anywhere in the health authority.

I went to the health authority—it was then the family health service authority—and pointed out that evidence, which was also linked to further findings revealing that the area has the greatest health need of anywhere in the district. So we have the worst health and the worst primary care. I asked the FHSA what it could do about it but the answer was that it could do nothing because it did not have the power or the instruments to intervene. It could do nothing about the distribution or the quality of primary care.

There is a town in the constituency that I hope to represent after the election which does not have a woman GP. The health authority has said that, apart from prevailing upon doctors, it can do nothing about it. It is a scandal that we cannot ensure that women have access to a female GP in a substantial town. We have not been able to do those things because we do not have the levers inside the system to direct primary care in the way that we know it should be directed.

There is a huge primary care agenda and the Bill begins to offer an opportunity to do something about it. The Secretary of State, rather coyly, tries to reassure everybody in sight by saying that this is not a pilot with a big bang. I hope that it is a pilot with a big bang, because it has huge potential to do the strategic things to primary care that we have never been able to do before.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) in her comments about the way in which it is possible for general practitioners to strike people off their list without any explanation or appeal. I have been concerned about that for some time. It is an affront to natural justice, but it is a direct consequence of proceeding on an individual contractor basis as opposed to a salaried basis. Presumably, when we move to a salaried basis, it will not happen, because it will be inconsistent with a publicly provided service.

I had a constituent recently who was severely mentally ill. He had spent time in mental hospitals and in prison. We searched everywhere for suitable provision for him and I had reached the end of my tether. I wrote a letter to every possible contributor to care for this person and said that, unless something happened soon, this person would kill himself or someone else. In October 1995, as a health care team, including a consultant psychiatrist, was on its way to see him, he committed suicide.

I asked for a review to be carried out to find out how that could have happened. I wanted to know why the system had let that person down. The trust carried out a review under the proper procedures. Perhaps the most striking thing to come out of the review was the fact that the person had been on a three-month rota between different GPs who did not know his medical history, sometimes did not have his records and were prescribing inappropriately for someone with his condition. They made it too easy for him to kill himself. The report said:

"The role of the General Practitioner was acknowledged as important in his care and indeed of other people with mental health needs. However, this is often, and was in this case, sabotaged"—

that is a strong word—

"by the ability of GPs to remove patients from their register at will."

The report goes on:

"The idea that those people who have the greatest potential mental health needs can be removed from a general practitioner's list every three months appears incongruous with the philosophy of community care."

In its recommendations, the report said:

"General Practitioners who want to remove those people from their register who have severe mental illness should only do so after discussions and consultation at a formal Care Programme Approach Review."

That would be bad enough if it was an isolated case, but it is not. I went to the old FHSA and asked about the strike-off rate of patients by GPs in my area. I discovered that we had the highest in the county—385 removals between 1992 and 1994.

Just this month, an elderly couple, one aged 82 and one aged 87, were deregistered for no apparent reason. They were informed by second-class post in a letter received on 21 January that they were being deregistered on 28 January. There was also the family whose mother had cancer and who were all removed from a list three weeks before her death, seemingly for no apparent reason. The stories go on.

I accept that there are difficult patients but we must do something with them. Some of the most difficult have the most severe conditions or come from the most distressed areas. No doubt some of them are very costly, but we cannot have a system where removal can take place without any explanation or right of appeal. I support what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax, and I hope that, together with its provisions to secure the right of people to choose doctors, the Bill will help to secure their right not to be removed arbitrarily from a doctor's list.

I want to issue another heresy. The Bill says that it will cost very little—it talked about £6 million as a set-up cost in the next year. I think that, potentially, it will cost us a great deal. The infusion of resources into a revamped team-based primary care sector that the Bill promises is likely to be enormous. If it is not to come from an already stretched secondary care sector, we should be honest about the funding. We must be honest about how we fund the health service. The Government talk rhetorically about extra funding year on year, but we know that that does not stand up over the next two or three years. We must be serious about whether we want to fund the health service so that it can develop in the way promised in the Bill. We have a duty to give the people of this country a choice about whether they want to do that.

My final heresy is to say that I am prepared to ask people to pay a health premium payment, an HPP—we must not use the word tax. We must ask them whether they want to make such a payment to secure the future of the health service for ever. I say that as someone who was born in the year in which the national health service was founded. We have a choice coming up: we have to decide whether we want to guarantee the future of the health service for the next half century. If we do, I am afraid that we must pay for it.

8.19 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I listened with considerable interest to everything that the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) said—I hope that I have got his constituency right. He was fortunate to

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

follow the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), who, I think, used to be a nurse in the national health service. Shortly before her came the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron). I am not sure whether he still has time to practise, but he has considerable experience in the national health service. I shall not follow my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) with a run-down of my various ailments over the past few years because it would take too long. I congratulate him on the birth of his son—I am sure that that is a happy occasion for all concerned.

Before coming to my main points, I question the way in which the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood attempted to elevate his arguments with the word "heresy". I did not find anything that he said in the least heretical and I do not imagine that those on the Labour Front Bench, or anybody else, will send him to the stake for what he has just said. He made a thoughtful, interesting and at times wrong-headed speech, but he should not try to persuade us that his arguments are any the better by describing his interesting remarks as heretical. We all listened with interest, but his arguments are not advanced one jot by over-egging their description.

I agree that not all primary care comes from general practitioners. It is right to stress that. I shall elaborate on it in a moment. I shall also talk about the interdisciplinary practices that he referred to. There is an interesting agreement across the House on those points.

I should like to be controversial to start with by picking a few holes in Labour's reasoned amendment. Why on earth did they draft it in that way? The third line says that the Bill

"fails to require health authorities to consult with patients and professional groups on pilot projects".

A failure to require that does not mean that they cannot or need not do such things. I suggest that that is a wholly otiose collection of words in that particular part of the proposed amendment.

The reasoned amendment goes on to say that the Bill

"fails to provide for nurses and other primary care professionals to participate fully in pilot projects where appropriate".

No doubt they will participate when appropriate. Primary legislation is not required for that.

Mr. Spring: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Garnier: I ask my hon. Friend to be a little patient, because I am making a fascinating point.

The reasoned amendment goes on to say that the Bill

"fails to establish criteria by which the success of pilot projects can be evaluated and fails to provide for health authorities to employ directly general practitioners".

The Bill may not include such provisions, but that does not detract from its value. The reasoned amendment goes on:

"it includes provisions to allow private companies to employ general practitioners to provide patient care, thereby undermining the doctor-patient relationship".

That is one of the more interesting—or perhaps less interesting—non-sequiturs that new Labour has come up with in recent weeks. The fact that one doctor has a different contractual arrangement with the person who pays his salary than does another has no bearing on the way in which he should provide patient care. To suggest that the doctor-patient relationship is undermined and damaged by that is simple poppycock. I suspect that the Labour party knows that, and merely wanted to add words to the amendment for the sake of it.

The amendment winds up with these wonderful words:

"the destruction of the principle of health care being available according to need and free at the point of delivery."

Nothing that is printed above those final two lines of the amendment has any bearing on that conclusion.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garnier: I shall give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), who is sitting patiently.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that flexibility is at the heart of the Bill—flexibility to adapt to local conditions that vary from one part of the country to another? Concomitant with that is the fact that pilot schemes for that purpose are inherent in the Bill.

Mr. Garnier: Labour Members may have drafted the amendment before they had read the Bill. My hon. Friend's point is a good one.

Mr. Barron: Why was the hon. and learned Gentleman not in the Chamber when the amendment that he has quoted was moved?

Mr. Garnier: Because I was elsewhere. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to wind up.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): He was in his chambers.

Mr. Garnier: I was not in chambers. The hon. Gentleman has been known to make inaccurate remarks of that sort before. I shall not rise to it.

I want to take issue with the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood and some of his hon. Friends who have been here for a little longer than the hon. and voluble Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) who sits for the provisional Labour party. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood made some valuable points about the primary care aspects of the Bill. Primary care is not always provided by the general practitioner; it is provided by a range of health professionals who play a complementary role to that of the GP. Visiting our general practitioner is the main point of contact with the NHS for most of us. However, a constituency Member of Parliament has to take a wider view and no doubt Ministers at the Department of Health have a better view of the bigger picture.

My constituency is fortunate in its primary care teams. I trust that they will be strengthened and their flexibility—to use the word chosen by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds—will be enhanced by some of the provisions in the Bill.

A range of medical professionals operate from Market Harborough, Kibworth, which is half way between Market Harborough and the city of Leicester, and the borough of Oadby and Wigston, which is the part of my constituency closest to the city of Leicester: health visitors; district nurses; occupational therapists; radiographers; and those engaged in the provision of continuing care, particularly for patients who have been in one of the three major hospitals in the city of Leicester and are not ready to go home, but need to convalesce or spend some time in a halfway house first.

All those people perform valuable and valued services in south-east Leicestershire. It is right, as the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood said, to think not only of general practitioners. Despite the fact that there is not, I think, a single fundholder, my constituency is fortunate in having excellent general practitioners who are dedicated to the national health service as an institution and to the care of their patients.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I admit that I have not been present for much of the debate because of other duties in the House, but I was particularly interested in many of the remarks by the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright). I know his area well—Cannock Chase and Burntwood. There used to be a major mental health hospital—St. Matthew's—in his area.

Does my hon. and learned Friend believe that the patients—the people of this country—would receive better health care, better treatment and better attention if the doctors, male or female, were salaried or, as at present, private professionals contracting to the national health service? Does he believe that the morale of doctors would be improved and that people would get better treatment if, as the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood suggests, they were salaried rather than contractors?

Mr. Garnier: When criticising the reasoned amendment, I pointed out that the allegation that a link with a private company that employs a general practitioner damages the quality of health care is fallacious. I hope that I have therefore already answered my hon. Friend in addressing the terms of the amendment. There may well be some excellent doctors who will want to continue as self-employed practitioners, and some excellent doctors who will want to become employed doctors. To me, what is important is the service and the care that they deliver, not the manner in which they are remunerated.

I should like to expand a little further on the provision of community primary care services, especially in so far as it affects my constituents. We were fortunate to be visited in the past fortnight by my hon. Friend the Minister, who was able to see for himself at first hand the provision of primary care not only in my constituency but in the city of Leicester. I trust that he came back to London with the message that, "If you want to be ill, Leicestershire is the place to do it." The county has some of the best equipment, personnel and hospitals at all levels, and is a credit to the NHS.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby has already discussed for some little while the three major acute hospitals in the city of Leicester, so I shall not repeat what he said. However, I remind my hon. Friend the Minister of what he will have been told when he came to Market Harborough not so long ago about the benefits of the local provision of primary care, particularly that given through the Market Harborough and District hospital on Coventry road in the town and in the local health centres.

I should like to draw the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to clause 27, which deals with pharmaceutical services. There has been considerable debate in my constituency about the provision of such services by rural GP practices. There is a competition, not to say an outright squabble, between pure pharmacists, who have shops and want to provide prescriptions, and rural GP practices, which earn quite a lot of their income by prescribing NHS drugs, thus enabling them to invest in the services that they want to provide for their patients. I trust that we can find our way to a sensible resolution of the dispute between rural GP practices and pharmaceutical service providers during debates on the Bill.

I should like to comment on the huge number of regulations suggested in the Bill. There is hardly a clause that does not provide for the creation of regulations. I am all for the proper use of regulations in order to deliver a particular service well, but I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench to bear very much in mind the problems of over-regulation. I gently chide them so that we do not end up with so much red tape and the binding of people to regulations that they cannot deliver what they are required to deliver.

The Opposition amendment complains—mention of it has been made by me, if not others—about the link between private employers and the provision of national health service GP services. I want the Government to encourage partnership between the private sector and the public sector.

One extremely good example of such partnership is the Macmillan green ribbon appeal at the Leicester Royal infirmary. As a consequence of that appeal, £1.5 million has been raised in the past year. The appeal committee was chaired by Mr. James Wilson of Gaulby in my constituency. As a result of the huge amount of money that he and his colleagues on the appeal committee have been able to raise, a whole new oncology building has been built next door to the royal infirmary.

That is a classic example of the proper exercise of partnership between the private sector and the public sector. The NHS will benefit from the building, while the private sector has played a useful role in building it and ensuring that its use will soon be under way.

The Bill ought to be welcomed. The Official Opposition's amendment is confused, confusing, and detracts from some of the better points that have been made by some Opposition Members, which is to be regretted. I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister will beat a speedy path back to Market Harborough so that he can see some of the other wonderful things that are going on in hospitals there.

8.34 pm

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I should say in response to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) that I have no difficulty at all in defending, and, indeed, supporting the reasoned amendment tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends. It is constructive. All Labour Members have made it very clear that the principle of a discussion of primary care is to be welcomed. Indeed, we have been calling for it for some considerable time.

[Mr. Richard Burden]

Parts of the Bill are to be welcomed, too, but since other hon. Members want to speak I shall not dwell on those aspects, save to say that the principle of piloting is a very good idea and is being welcomed around the country. I know that in Birmingham, which has been at the forefront of developing ideas for local commissioning of the kind that Labour Members have been suggesting, people are coming up with some fairly imaginative ideas for pilots that the Government could take up if the Bill is enacted.

There are nevertheless significant weaknesses in the Bill, which so far the Government have not addressed. The first is one of principle. I still fail to see—I mentioned this the last time that I contributed to a debate on the health service—how the Government can think that an effective primary care strategy can work, with the co-operation that it involves between different parts of the health service, if it is grafted on to a market mechanism whose ethos is splitting up the health service into different units and making them compete with each other.

That is very different from saying that there is anything wrong with separating the commissioning from the providing of health care, which makes a good deal of sense. For the health service to function effectively as a national service—whether that be nationally or in the locality—co-operation and team work of the kind mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) is required, not competition.

Mr. Spring: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burden: With respect, a number of hon. Members want to speak, so I will make progress. I will not be able to take any interventions. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know how the system to which I referred can work and focus more on quality, I could do worse than refer him to the speech on quality in health care and the building of a co-operative ethos in the health service made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), the shadow Secretary of State for Health, only last week.

I should like to address the problems in the Bill and I hope that, in winding up, the Minister will clear up some points on which I at least am still a little hazy. The Government have said that they have listened to the criticism about what has been described as the supermarket surgery—the commercialisation aspects of the Bill—and that they will table an amendment to address them. I am still rather confused about what the Government intend to do.

It has been said—I think that the Secretary of State indicated it when he opened the debate—that the question of direct employment of general practitioners by commercial enterprises will not be acceptable under the proposed amendment. Will the Minister clarify exactly what is meant by direct employment? Perhaps more to the point, does he envisage indirect employment, and what might the consequences be for commercialisation of the health service?

I put to the Secretary of State earlier a problem that already exists when there is a commercial relationship between a patient and an outside body, and the impact that it can have on GP referral patterns. Such a problem is equally relevant when the relationship is between the GP and commercial areas. GPs are telling me that, if a patient comes to see them under the health service but is a member of a private health insurance scheme and a referral is needed, there can be pressure on the GP—if the referral is to be through the private insurance scheme—to refer to the preferred provider. So the GP's role as a purchaser of health care can be compromised.

If it can happen that way round, it can also happen if the GP is tied into a commercial firm outside. I ask the Minister to define exactly what the Government mean when they talk about employment, and where the boundaries are. There is also a question relating to acute trusts. The Minister said in the last debate on this matter, and the Secretary of State mentioned it again today, that while it is unlikely that acute trusts would employ salaried GPs, the Government were not prepared to rule it out. They said that it would be ruled out only where there is a conflict of interest. When the Minister winds up, I want him to talk about where he thinks that there would be a conflict of interest, and equally important where he thinks that there would not.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury mentioned earlier that if a local acute trust employed a salaried GP, that might create a problem in that it would be cornering the market for referrals, which would put pressure on the GP. I also see a problem if the acute trust was not in a local area and was trying to attract business—to use the market term—for its own hospital by employing a GP in another area. I ask the Minister to clarify how he will guard against those problems.

If commercial enterprises can have a role in this, and if acute trusts can employ GPs, why cannot health authorities? The Secretary of State said earlier today that it would compromise the purchaser-provider split, but the GP's role is one of both purchaser and provider. The Government are saying that a health authority cannot employ a GP because the GP is a provider of health care, but what about the fact that a GP is also a purchaser of health care? If the GP is employed by an acute trust, that compromises the purchaser-provider split. If a health authority is to fulfil the role of identifying health needs in an area and enable the development of primary health care, what reason is there for preventing it from employing GPs?

There are flaws in the Bill, but that does not remove the value of discussing primary care and having new legislation on that. There is a shortage of GPs. There are recruitment problems, and they must be addressed. The boundaries that used to exist between secondary and primary care are becoming fuzzy and in many places are breaking down. It is no longer easy to determine exactly what should take place in a hospital and what should take place in a local health centre, but the structure of NHS finance still maintains that division, which is not there in reality.

I give just one example. If a patient on a low income needs to get to a hospital that is not nearby, it is likely that he or she will get financial assistance for transport, but if the same patient needs the same treatment and instead gets it at the local health centre, he or she cannot get financial assistance to get there because it is not funded in the same way. Those anomalies need to be addressed. I welcome the Bill in so far that it has started the discussion, but without the reasoned amendment tabled by the Labour party it is flawed.

If a primary health care strategy is to be developed and is to mean what it says in developing a national health service that prevents ill health as well as treating the

consequences of ill health, it needs to look beyond the boundaries of the health service. It is a fact that the life expectancy of somebody in the lowest income tenth of the population is eight years less than that of somebody in the highest income tenth of the population. Unless we as a society address the problems of poor housing, of the benefit system and the poverty trap, of the availability of work and of low pay, a primary health care strategy will not work. A multi-disciplinary approach is needed to tackle the problem, not just within the health service but between the health service and our economic policies.

Sadly, from "The Health of the Nation" White Paper onwards, the Government have not shown themselves willing to acknowledge the huge link between poverty and ill health. Until the Government address that issue, we shall not have an effective primary health care strategy in this country.

8.44 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I give a very warm welcome to the Bill. It is fundamental and is a natural development of the way in which health care is going. This afternoon, however, I appeared on a television programme with the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell). I think that she will recall that our conversations appeared at complete odds. She talked about "crisis in the health service", constantly running the health service down, somehow suggesting that GPs are to be in the pay of unscrupulous commercial organisations.

Ms Jowell: Rubbish.

Lady Olga Maitland: It is all very well for the hon. Lady to say, "Rubbish," but that is the truth.

What worries me is that such a performance is deeply damaging. It does not enhance her own cause and it worries the patients outside. The hon. Lady carries a grave responsibility when people then ring up believing the erroneous and totally inaccurate information fed to them by the Labour party. On the one hand, the Labour party says that it is all for the national health service, but on the other it bashes it down, runs it down and denigrates all the work that we have done.

It is a curious fact that when I talk to people in their own homes and we discuss the health service, they say, "I'm very worried." When I ask them why they are worried, they tell me that they are worried because of what the Labour party says—that the health service is in crisis. It is in no crisis at all. Indeed, when we discuss the situation a bit more, people tell me that they understand that the Conservatives have put more money than ever before into health care.

It is important that we try to brush away the cobwebs and confusion put about by the Labour party and look more positively at what the Government are trying to do. We are trying to move ahead with the times. We have recognised that we have reached a stage where GPs are able to provide a service that is second to none. Give them their freedom, allow them to become fundholders—as more than half the country's GPs are—and it is excellence that they provide. I have seen the differences for myself in a fundholding practice, which now carries out minor surgery. It has consulting rooms where people are given counselling about various problems. People come in to give physiotherapy. It has employed nurses. It links up with osteopaths. There is no end to the services that an effective GP fundholding practice can provide.

There is another side to the coin, however. While such practices are going full blast in perhaps the more prosperous areas—in my constituency they are a wonderful showcase of modern medicine—I am aware that there are GPs working on their own, particularly in the inner cities, which are less attractive to GPs, who badly need to expand the services that they would like to provide.

Would it not make marvellous sense for such a GP to branch out and set up a relationship, say, with the local supermarket or shopping centre to bring in private finance, like the private finance initiative, which the Labour party is not a bit against, as I understand it, to bring in fresh money and fresh enterprise and thus be able to provide the services that they are not able to provide on their own? That is known as flexibility and moving with the times; it will certainly respond to patients' needs, and I believe that it will be greatly appreciated.

I am worried about the Labour party's allegation that there will be unscrupulous behaviour and that doctors will be in hock to companies which will insist on selling only those drugs and treatments that generate a profit to themselves. That allegation totally ignores all the safeguards which are built into the Bill to ensure that the health service continues to provide the excellence, honesty and integrity that it has always provided.

It is reassuring that in another place a number of their Lordships conceded that the Bill would provide services that will be much appreciated. The fact that the pilot schemes have to be referred to the health authority and then to the Secretary of State, and that he can veto unsuitable schemes, shows that we are not allowing unscrupulous people to get through. I would be more worried about too much red tape and bureaucracy slowing up a jolly good idea, which would spoil what we are trying to do. We could be almost too careful. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will address that point.

We have moved into an age in which we should be expanding and taking advantage of all the outside interests which could benefit patient care. That is the name of the game, and I give the Bill a warm welcome and wish it a safe passage.

8.51 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I had a nightmare last night that I believe was brought on by the Secretary of State's words following the Queen's Speech, as quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). Perhaps it happened because Asda is prominent in my constituency or because I have met Archie Norman once or twice on business connected with Asda and my constituents. He is obviously an able entrepreneur, and I know that he now has other roles in the Tory party.

In my nightmare, I imagined Asda setting up surgeries in my constituency. A patient would go to an Asda surgery and tell the doctor that he was suffering from stress; shortly afterwards, he would receive an advertisement for Asda products—low-fat, easy-to-cook, microwaveable nouvelle cuisine, perhaps—that would be good for his condition. I imagined in my nightmare that such a tie-up might happen.

The Secretary of State told me today that I was completely wrong and that there would be no commercial pressures. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury was kind, and the hon. Member for

[Mr. John Gunnell]

Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was disingenuous, in responding to that. The latter regarded it as a pledge that was there for all time, but I believe what Colin Brown wrote in today's *The Independent*. He said:

"Mr Dorrell agreed to revise the clause after the British Medical Association warned that it would ask GPs to make the proposal for 'supermarket surgeries' an election issue."

I rather think that that is why the proposal has been dropped. It is potentially dangerous, because it shows that privatisation, perhaps by stealth, could happen in primary care if the Conservatives won a further term. I am sure, however, that the public will have understood that message.

I understand that the Minister played a critical role in securing that pledge from the Secretary of State; that is because he has been at the front line of the consultations and knows that GPs do not want commercialisation or commercial pressures, as the BMA made very clear. Will he make it absolutely clear that clause 14 will be dropped from the Bill? It was said that only health service bodies would make provision, but under the clause a non-health service body could do so.

If the clause is dropped, my nightmare will not come true—at least not for the moment: I should like to be completely sure that it was dropped for all time and not merely to woo the electorate. The public have made it absolutely clear that they do not want doctors provided by commercial organisations.

In Morley in my constituency, there is an extremely active community pharmacy, the Janet Ward pharmacy, that has an excellent system of working with a local GP and providing a genuine community service, taking care of all the pensioners and people in serious and urgent need. To do that, it has to maintain large stocks, and it is running an excellent business. It is helpful if such community activities can be part of an NHS contract, as is suggested in the Bill. I am in favour of that.

The pharmacy, however, is just down the road from the Asda store, which undercuts its prices for drugs. As a result, it is becoming more difficult for it to stock the necessary range and quantity of drugs. Two aspects of the Bill are therefore working in conflict with one another. I do not want to deal with the specifics of the sale of drugs and price maintenance, but that is not unrelated to continuing community pharmacies.

We broadly welcome the Bill, as long as the commercial clause 14 is dropped. We consider that the Bill gives a welcome flexibility in GP contracts and view it as a boost for local co-operation in the provision of primary medical services. It is a departure from the narrow competition of fundholding. The patient is currently disadvantaged by the rigidity of a system that prevents GPs from taking a greater role in the development of services.

I am glad that the Government have come to see the value in Labour's policy of local commissioning. Apart from our concern about the role of acute hospitals trusts, which my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) mentioned, the Bill, once it has been pruned of its more dangerous elements, is to be welcomed.

I have some specific questions for the Minister. Nurses and midwives have been mentioned several times. In Committee in the Lords, Baroness McFarlane tabled an amendment to make the right of nurses to set up a primary practice an explicit part of the Bill. Baroness Cumberlege rejected that as unnecessary, because she believed that the Secretary of State would look favourably on some nurses' pilot schemes; but how will we get such schemes unless that is made clear in the Bill?

I welcome the possibility of pilot schemes in NHS dentistry. It is worrying that NHS dentists have almost disappeared in some places, especially where there is a sufficient potential base of private patients.

On commissioning, I asked the Secretary of State about the time limit for schemes. I was glad that he said that he would table an amendment to set a maximum time of three years but I am surprised that he does not think that we need an amendment to set a minimum time. The British Medical Association suggests 18 months, which is a sensible time for a pilot to run. It is important that pilots run for a complete financial year because the way in which schemes are financed is important.

I am not convinced that the Bill and its explanatory and financial memorandum allow enough money. For the financial year 1997-98, a provisional £6 million has been allowed. Clause 16 allows for public funding of the costs of preparing the pilot schemes. It sets limits on such funding and allows for repayment if conditions are not complied with, but is there a potential additional cost to health authorities that the Secretary of State will not fund? It is unrealistic to think that £6 million will cover the cost of preparing, managing, monitoring and evaluating schemes.

I am worried about the single budget for health care. It is right to have one, but once schemes are up and running, clause 32 provides that health authorities will fund costs from cash-limited expenditure that currently funds hospital and community care. We are told that the single health budget is intended to boost cottage hospitals, but the Government have closed 245 of them since 1990. There is no estimate in the memorandum of how much will have to be transferred from the non-cash-limited budget that is currently used for general practice. Will any shortfall come out of health authority purchasing power? There will also be an effect on secondary care funding. I doubt whether all the changes can be funded from £6 million and efficiency savings in primary care.

We welcome much of the Bill but we need to be convinced that the Secretary of State has really chopped off his previous commitment to the commercialisation of services. I would like to be sure that that is not, as *The Independent* says, an electoral response. We are concerned about the effect of commercialisation on the doctor-patient relationship.

We are concerned about the distribution of GPs around the country. I agree with the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims) and my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) about the importance of the present restriction on general practices coming into pre-registration training. It is anachronistic to talk about health centres as the Bill does. It suggests that all progressive general practices are in health centres. I should not have thought the Secretary of State would want to cut out fundholders from undertaking such work, but that is what he is doing by using only practices within publicly funded health centres. I hope that he will consider that carefully. It is time that I sat down, but I hope that the Minister will comment on some of those important points.

9.4 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): I very much welcome the Bill, which deals with primary care. Primary care is regarded by many as the jewel in the crown of the NHS, and it is also the envy of other health services throughout the world.

It is often said that many professions enjoy low public esteem and certainly—according to the polls—we as Members of Parliament share with journalists and estate agents that low esteem. Even the clergy sometimes have difficulties. But one profession that enjoys considerable public esteem is the medical profession—our GPs. That is because they are a central part of life in our cities, towns and villages. The local accessibility and the trust that they have developed among their patients and in their communities are so valuable. Part of the primary care provision is the role of community nurses, to whom I pay special tribute. Many of my constituents have talked about the role that they play.

In the evolution of GPs—and latterly of fundholders—there has been an expansion in the services they offer. We can all remember the old-fashioned premises in which doctors used to operate, which were not at all user-friendly. Today—particularly in GP fundholding practices—one enters an environment that is wholly different from that of the past. Services such as minor surgery, chiropody, improved diagnostic procedures, ultrasound, X-ray facilities and pharmaceutical services are provided, and these are greatly valued by local communities.

I saw that for myself in the village of Lakenheath in my constituency, which has 5,500 residents. Doctors in the village wanted to increase the scope of the pharmaceutical services that they provided to the community. Another pharmacist came along and wanted to set up a rival operation but, interestingly, local people passionately wanted only the doctors to provide the service. Whatever the pros and cons of that issue were, it underlined the value of primary care services and how much they are trusted and appreciated in our communities.

I have mentioned the enhanced range of services that are available, but following GP fundholding there has been an additional drive to quality. This has been led by the fact that realistic choices are given to GPs to pursue better services for the treatment of their patients. In the past few weeks, I have written to all the GP fundholders in my constituency, and I am slowly beginning to receive replies. Many are concerned about the setting up of the so-called locality GP commissioning groups. They have asked me what these will mean in practice, and whether GPs will lose the right to direct patients to hospitals of their choice. They are concerned about the potential additional bureaucracy of the so-called consultation process involved in the setting up and operation of the commissioning groups.

The truth is that there have been many changes at the primary end of the NHS, but it is now basically working very well indeed. If it ain't broke, don't fix it—that is the principle. However, there is a feeling that the current national arrangements are inadequate as they are insufficiently flexible. It is true that the needs of communities differ from one part of the country to the next. But at the heart of the Bill—this is what makes it so welcome—is additional local flexibility to allow GPs to match their skills to the needs of their communities and patients. The Bill will also provide a legal framework for medical and dental services. I particularly welcome the fact that pilot schemes are seen as part and parcel of the way in which it is envisaged the Bill will operate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) referred to preventive medicine. In the expansion of primary care facilities in this country, we have seen an ever greater emphasis on preventive medicine. Health care needs are being brought to the attention of the people. We would all like to live to a ripe old age in a healthy way, and I am sure that hon. Members will agree that Dame Barbara Cartland is a shining example of that.

The fact is that local flexibility needs to adjust to different circumstances. When I served on the Select Committee on Health, I went to the east end of London, where there are considerable problems with respiratory and bronchial ailments that need to be addressed at a primary level. Those problems are being addressed and the services will be enhanced by the Bill.

I also welcome the fact that, as primary care has evolved, there has been greater use of complementary medicine, especially by GP fundholders. Homeopathy is now seen to work at a complementary level and many doctors believe that there is some value in that. Hon. Members will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) introduced a Bill to bring chiropractic into the mainstream of accepted medical practice and the same change of attitude is happening in respect of osteopathy—an holistic approach, which has been pioneered at the primary level and is so welcome in expanding services in this country.

I am delighted to say that, on Friday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will come to my constituency to visit Newmarket hospital—indeed, some years ago when he was a junior Minister, he was involved in the decisions about the future of the hospital. He will see that out of that £8 million project has come an important bridge from primary care to the sort of services that are offered at the hospital, leading up to acute care facilities. The level of satisfaction among out-patients is high and the services that are offered, working closely with GPs, including radiography and physiotherapy, are greatly valued.

That flexibility is so important. Only this afternoon, I received a letter from a GP in Newmarket telling me how successful the new hospital was and how well he was able to slot in his activities at primary level with those of the hospital. We now have a spectrum of NHS services that is clearly enhancing patient care.

I want to make one point in respect of acute care. Many spurious points have been made about the health of the NHS as a whole. As I go around the main acute care hospital in my constituency, the West Suffolk hospital in Bury St. Edmunds, and look at the staggering range of new facilities that has been introduced over the past few years—from the day surgery centre to the state-of-the-art intensive care wards to a brand-new £500,000 operating theatre—I know that more patients are being treated and better services are being offered. I pay tribute, on behalf of my constituents, to the range of facilities that are now offered.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to comment on one issue that has been brought to my attention by GPs in my constituency, which is the fact that many of them feel that the route into working in hospitals—the possibility of moving up and perhaps becoming consultants—has

[Mr. Richard Spring]

become increasingly attractive relative to the alternative of staying on as GPs. Many feel that for a variety of reasons the attraction of being a GP, as opposed to working in a hospital environment, has lessened somewhat in the past few years. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would comment on that.

The level of actual NHS satisfaction is extremely high. The expansion of primary care has been greatly welcomed, not only in my constituency but throughout the whole country. At the heart of the Bill is a principle with which I wholeheartedly agree: the principle of pilot schemes to ensure that the flexibility inherent in the Bill is introduced appropriately. The Bill also ensures legislative changes to make the carrying out of primary care more appropriate.

The Bill moves primary care into a further stage of sophistication and attractiveness. I very much welcome it.

9.14 pm

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn): I welcome some of the measures in the Bill, such as appointments to single-handed practices, the move towards practice-based contracts and the provision for salaried GPs. Yet I reflect that, when Aneurin Bevan founded the national health service, the guiding principle was that the health service should be available according to need and free at the point of delivery. Sadly, 18 years of Tory rule have seen the erosion of that principle, and I fear that, if the Bill is passed as it stands, it will lead to the destruction of that principle.

We have already had the introduction of individual GP fundholding, which, with the internal market, has without question brought about a two-tier health service. Many patients are no longer treated on the basis of need. Instead, other factors such as age, where they live or whether their GP is a fundholder are considered important.

Last year, I was at the European Surgical Institute in Hamburg with several British consultants. One of them told me that he had been telephoned by a GP who asked him what he charged to do a hernia operation privately. He replied: "Seven hundred pounds." The GP replied: "I will give you £10,000; do it for £300." That is not the language of health care but the language of the market trader.

Senior staff to whom I have spoken in the health service confirm that treatment is no longer available on the basis of need. I fear that, if the Bill is passed in its present form, it will accentuate the variation in the quality of services that patients receive and encourage cherry picking.

I listened to what the Secretary of State said about amendments that would be tabled in Committee, and I welcome what he said. However, the Bill as drafted offers no safeguards against the growth of a two-tier health service—a two-tier health service in which hospital services are effectively being denied patients who are not registered with a GP fundholder.

In September 1996, Derek Smith, chief executive of King's Healthcare NHS trust in south London, said:

"a two-tier NHS is an everyday reality".

It is an everyday reality for those who rely on the NHS.

Recently, in another place, Baroness Jay said that there is surely something wrong when Lincoln county hospital writes to all non-fundholding GPs in its area, cancelling out-patient appointments for the rest of the financial year, although it is telling fundholding GPs that they can continue to send their patients there.

The Bill will have a significant effect on the way in which the health service operates. Pilot schemes are a key feature of the Bill, which I welcome. I also welcome the Government's change of mind on pilot schemes. It is quite a surprise to many people in the medical profession and elsewhere. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) expressed his surprise earlier.

I recall the remarks of Dr John Marks, chairman of the BMA, at the time when the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was Secretary of State for Health, suggesting that we should have pilot schemes, to which the Secretary of State replied that he would not agree to them because the BMA would sabotage them.

The provision in the Bill that allows "other bodies" to become involved in the formulation of pilot schemes by sponsoring someone who has an existing NHS contract or by allowing them to apply to become health service bodies is obviously deeply worrying. We must wait until the Committee stage to discover what more the Secretary of State has to say on that point.

Supermarkets, large pharmaceutical companies and private health care companies have all been considering the feasibility of becoming involved in pilot schemes. Asda has been considering plans to provide rental space for GPs in supermarkets. Unichem has plans to build up to 20 new health centres and has suggested that it should employ GPs as part of a consortium with BUPA. PPP Healthcare proposed a pilot scheme involving provision of GP services at the company's private hospitals with referrals for hospital care to the hospital. We shall need to discover in Committee what the Secretary of State plans.

Those are significant concerns—concerns about the integrity and quality of primary health care and about the very existence of the national health service. I know that they are shared by the BMA and general practitioners. Only yesterday, I spoke to a general practitioner in my constituency, Dr. Sahni. He tells me that, to his knowledge, about 80 to 90 per cent. of GPs consider most of the proposals in the Bill to be extremely damaging. As Dr. Sahni pointed out, when a large pharmaceutical company becomes involved the emphasis is no longer on patient care. Commercial organisations would be under pressure to maximise income and it is probable that they would seek to sell a range of services and products that are not necessarily in the interests of patient care.

Some aspects of the Bill risk destabilising the general practitioner service. At the moment, patients know that the NHS family doctor has a contract with the state. The BMA has stated that the family doctor service remains, and must remain, fully within the NHS and not be open to direct or indirect privatisation. Under the Tory Government, we have seen creeping privatisation. It is no longer possible for the majority to get free eye tests, which are an essential health check, and the number of dentists offering treatment under the NHS continues to fall. That is the legacy of the Tories, and I fear that the Bill provides for more privatisation.

Doctors to whom I talk tell me that they are disillusioned and demoralised, and we must take account of what they say. They are dedicated professionals,

but they have enormous difficulty securing the best care for their patients because of the internal market and creeping privatisation.

We cannot run primary or secondary health care like a supermarket. Doctors know that, the Opposition know that and the people of our country know that, but Conservative Members do not know it. Like Opposition Members, doctors and the public believe that general medical services must remain fully within the NHS; that GPs must be free to exercise independent clinical judgment; and that the Bill, as it stands, will fundamentally destroy the basic principle of the NHS. The public ask why the Tories never learn.

9.21 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): The Secretary of State's announcement on commercialisation was a huge climbdown, but it was born of coercion rather than conviction. At the launch of the White Paper "Choice and Opportunity" that preceded the Bill, the Secretary of State was glorying in headlines that heralded the "big bang" style deregulation of general practice. It was claimed that the way would be opened for supermarkets and other private companies to employ GPs. The GPs would then be accountable to their employers—a different prospect from supermarkets or any other potential landlord being able to offer premises for rent to GPs.

Before the Secretary of State's climbdown, Asda and Unichem were trailed as having an interest in employing GPs, PPP Healthcare had already submitted a bid and one central London GP claimed to have had three approaches from private companies. The future appeared to be one of American-style health maintenance organisations that could pick and choose between patients.

What has happened? We know that the Secretary of State now deals with health as his day job, while moonlighting—much to the irritation and embarrassment of his colleagues—on devolution, Europe and constitutional matters. For the benefit of the House, perhaps the Secretary of State can clear up the confusion on whether he speaks on constitutional matters—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry to call the hon. Lady to order, but, however wide Second Reading debates may be, the Bill does not embrace constitutional reform.

Ms Jowell: We are concerned to ensure that the Secretary of State is fighting for patients and not fighting to become the Leader of the Opposition after the election. The difficulty is another example of the chaos that is besetting the Government. During the Secretary of State's distractions, GPs have been standing up for the values of the national health service—hence today's climbdown.

The proposals for the privatisation of primary care have been dropped not out of conviction, but to avoid a row with the British Medical Association in the run-up to the election. If the Government thought that they could get away with it, they would go ahead.

The Secretary of State said in his opening remarks that he thought that the concern raised by Labour and the BMA about the commercialisation of general practice was misplaced. The implication was that the misunderstanding was on our part. Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman of his comment to *Pulse*:

"If a service cannot be provided using other routes, commercial enterprise may offer a solution."

Even though the Government have backed off, there is still enormous scope, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) rightly pointed out, for a new relationship between the private sector and general practice—a relationship that we believe would be to the detriment of patient care. Despite the Secretary of State's climbdown, we shall use the Committee stage, if the Bill secures a Second Reading, to ensure that further avenues to privatisation and fragmentation of the national health service are closed.

The Secretary of State spoke today about

"the importance of the pilot-based approach."

We welcome that change of heart, but it will surprise many in the NHS who still have the bruises to show from the previous round of Tory NHS reforms. The then Secretary of State, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), still speaks proudly of imposing the Government's dogmatic internal market on a reluctant health service. He said at the time:

"I was quite sure that if you isolated a few places as pilots, all the best efforts of the BMA element in the medical profession would be bent to ensure that it failed."

Had he shared the more consensual approach preferred by the current Secretary of State, we would not be saddled with a bureaucratic competitive market that is universally detested in the NHS.

Then there is the Secretary of State's discovery of the value of GP commissioning. Welcome to Labour's cause, which appeared in the White Paper, "Choice and Opportunity". Labour's proposals will ensure equity between patients, less bureaucracy and co-operation between GPs in the procurement of patient care.

GP fundholding, however, has reinforced inequity between patients. Whether or not people have fundholding GPs has become a major and unfair determinant of whether they get hospital treatment. As the Audit Commission remarked, fundholders tend to come from suburbs and shires, rather than inner cities, and, as a natural corollary, tend to look after more affluent and less socially deprived patients.

We also welcome the Government's climbdown today on the critical role played by the Medical Practices Committee in central work force planning, and ensuring within the terms of its remit that there is an even spread of family doctors across the country. As my hon. Friends have made clear during the debate, there are parts of the country that suffer from chronic shortages of GPs. In my health authority and that of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), 20 GP vacancies are currently unfilled.

I pay tribute to the Medical Practices Committee for its rigour in checking the eligibility of GPs to practise. It is worth noting, and I am sure it is not accidental, that, since the NHS was created, only one bogus GP has ever entered practice. That demonstrates the rigour with which the committee applies itself to its task.

We welcome the fact that the Secretary of State was so adamant that the Bill as at present drafted does not preclude nurse-led pilots. That must be made clear to the BMA and the Royal College of Nursing, which have slightly different concerns, but are both clear that the Bill as drafted excludes that possibility. We shall return to that in Committee if the Bill secures a Second Reading, so that the position can be made absolutely clear.

[Ms Jowell]

As my hon. Friends have said, there are parts of the Bill that we welcome and support. We hope that the proposal to allow community trusts to employ GPs will help to address the chronic problems of GP recruitment in some areas. The move towards practice-based contracts is welcome, as are the new rules for the appointment of GPs to single-handed practices. The only question is why it did not occur many years ago. Hon. Members raised many other issues during the debate that we shall wish to pursue in Committee, if the Bill gets that far.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) drew attention to the worrying decline in the number of medical trainees entering general practice. He suggested that medical students should conduct part of their training in general practice. He makes common cause with the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims), and I hope that it will be possible to proceed with the proposal on the basis of cross-party support.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) made a valuable contribution to the debate, setting out in detail the inequity in the distribution of primary care resources. He also underlined the enormous discrepancy between the number of GPs per patient in different parts of the country. The inequitable distribution of national health service resources is one of the Government's worst legacies, and will be addressed as a matter of priority by a Labour Government.

The hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) raised concerns about the conflict of interest in acute trusts that employ GPs. We share his concern, but the situation was not illuminated by the Secretary of State's explanation as to why the purchaser-provider split is blurred by health authorities employing GPs, but not by acute trusts doing the same thing. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) drew attention to the threat to the doctor-patient relationship posed by the involvement of the private sector in the delivery of primary care. She gave the example of PPP Healthcare, which wants to establish a base for GP services at its private hospitals in London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) raised an important issue regarding the lack of women GPs. He cited the example of the town just outside the boundaries of his constituency where there are no female GPs. Women should have the opportunity to register with female GPs if they prefer to do so, and it is quite wrong for the health service to deny them that choice.

However, we must understand some of the issues that lie behind the recruitment difficulties. More women are entering medical school, but the family-unfriendly nature of employment in the health service often makes it difficult for women, in particular, to combine the responsibilities of rearing a family with the responsibilities of general practice. There are other outstanding issues which the Secretary of State failed to address today, that we shall pursue if the Bill is sent to Committee.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I share many of the hon. Lady's concerns about the improvements that the Bill must deliver. However, given the Secretary of State's announcement—which I think we all welcome—do the hon. Lady and her colleagues intend to press the reasoned amendment? Do they want the Bill to fail tonight, or do they want to get it on to the statute book?

Ms Jowell: We want to ensure that the points that we have made in our reasoned amendment are put to a vote in the House. We believe that, unless they are addressed, the Bill will be seriously weakened. I look forward to hearing the Minister respond to those issues in winding up.

In his concluding remarks, the Secretary of State mentioned that GPs who leave pilot schemes will be able to return to independent contractor status. We welcome that assurance, which will undoubtedly reassure GPs who wish to participate in pilot schemes. However, we were concerned by the Secretary of State's failure to mention any protection for patients who registered for pilot schemes that were discontinued. Listening to the Secretary of State—who is now chatting to his hon. Friend the Minister for Health—one was left with the impression that patients' interests are peripheral to the Bill. That impression was strengthened by the Secretary of State's remarks about the need for consultation with patients, to which we refer in our amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury pointed out the lack of detail on the precise course that any consultation should follow. No reference was made by the Secretary of State to the need for the view of patients to be fully considered before pilot projects are established.

In Committee—if we reach that stage—we shall pursue that issue, and shall seek an assurance from Ministers that pilot schemes will not proceed without first having been open to comment and consultation with patients. We shall also press the Government on the need for patients to be properly protected in the event of a pilot scheme being discontinued, and on the need for proper consultation with patients.

The Secretary of State did not provide any detail on what the proposals in the Bill will do to address the crisis in NHS dentistry and to ensure that people have access to NHS dentists. Many people in the world outside would like to know what the Government intend to do. The British Dental Association found that one in three people have trouble finding an NHS dentist. There are enormous regional variations.

When the White Paper was published, the Secretary of State remarked:

"The last 17 years have seen . . . steady growth of NHS dentistry".—[*Official Report*, 15 October 1996; Vol. 282, c. 589.]

That glib claim shows no understanding of the real problems that many people face when trying to find an NHS dentist. He should speak to his hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who admitted that it has become harder in recent years to find an NHS dentist.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jowell: The hon. Gentleman has not been present for the whole of the debate, so I shall not give way.

We want the Government to explain how the proposals are intended to solve that problem.

The White Paper, "Choice and Opportunity", was welcomed for its recognition that the two-tier service engendered by the Government's reforms is unacceptable. It stated:

"It will be important not to create inequity of resources for patients of different practices."

Sadly, the Bill offers no safeguards to prevent that. We shall return to that matter if the Bill reaches Committee.

The White Paper also admitted that the Tories have neglected primary care in many parts of the country. That is not a startling revelation to Opposition Members. It says:

"The quality of service for some patient groups in some areas is not always high."

That was another welcome admission, but again the Bill contains no proposals to end the unacceptable variations in the standard of primary care across the country.

Other issues should be given detailed consideration. Whistle blowing was brought back into the spotlight this week by the dreadful revelations at Ashworth hospital. As independent contractors, GPs currently have the freedom to raise issues of concern on behalf of their patients. Should the Bill be passed in its current form, and should the employment of GPs become the responsibility of NHS trusts, that freedom would be curtailed. We do not believe that that would be in the interests of patients. We believe that that freedom should be preserved.

Should the Bill reach Committee, we shall want to discuss the lack of detail on the process by which pilot projects will move to permanent schemes, and the impact of a single budget for health care with its attendant risks, to which a number of hon. Members referred.

This may be the final debate on health in this Parliament: it certainly will be if the Government have their way. The Bill provides a building block, and in part we welcome that. The manner of its management in the other place, and the Secretary of State's announcement today, constitute an extraordinary climbdown. The Government wanted to privatise general practice, but they realised that they could not get away with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury made it clear that amendments were withdrawn on Report in the other place and did not reappear on Third Reading, without any adequate explanation. We have now had a major climbdown by the Secretary of State. Given the chaotic management of the Bill, we believe that, before it goes to Standing Committee, consultation should be held with professional interests and groups that will be directly affected. That is an important part of ensuring that the legislation will work in practice.

In essence, the Bill is a long-overdue response to problems of the Government's own making. The British Medical Association has said:

"GP morale is at its lowest ebb for many years, is caused by excessive workload, the continuing out of hours burden, too much bureaucracy and falling remuneration relative to comparable professions".

It is because those problems have been ignored for so long that there is now an acute shortage of GPs in so many areas.

As my hon. Friends have made clear, there is much in the White Paper and the Bill that we welcome, but—as careful reading of, in particular, the White Paper reveals—it is a very quiet and muted apology for the damage that the Government have done to the national health service. It comes at the tail end of a Parliament, before a general election that we hope will produce a Labour Government—a Labour Government who will use the acceptable parts of the legislation to rebuild primary care, and to rebuild a national health service in the interests of patients and of all the people of this country.

9.40 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) with some interest. I am glad that the Bill is broadly supported by the House; indeed, the hon. Lady claimed that it was long overdue. It is somewhat unusual in such circumstances for the Labour party to table a reasoned amendment that would deny the Bill a Second Reading, and I cannot quite square that with what has been said.

Having heard both the hon. Lady's speech and that of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), as well as supporting speeches from other Opposition Members, I think it was clear that they were straining to highlight issues that divide the House, when there was a general consensus on the principles of the Bill—although, of course, we shall have to address certain issues in Committee.

I do not think that the hon. Lady made a terribly good job of distancing her party from what the Government are trying to do. She does herself no credit by trying to raise scares, and trying to elevate issues that were, perhaps, always at the periphery of what was happening as we introduced the legislation to a central position that they never held. I am delighted to be able to say that there is a great deal of consensus between the Government and the medical profession, whose members consider the Bill necessary. *[Interruption.]* We are hearing the normal sedentary interventions from the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). If he had been here to listen to the debate, he would have found that many of his hon. Friends broadly welcomed the Bill.

Let me return for a moment to the genesis of the proposal. Primary care has served the country well since the national health service was brought into being in the late 1940s. It has had an honourable career for some 50 years, but during those 50 years, it has largely remained unchanged: it is still delivered in the same form as when it was first introduced. Those who read the original document advising patients what to do to register with a general practitioner back in 1948 will note that the sonorities are the same—and that, moreover, the details are the same.

A truth has been acknowledged by all the professionals who provide the primary health care team: a truth that is certainly recognised by the Government and, perhaps somewhat grudgingly, by the Labour party. Although Labour Members may now have been converted to some of the principles in the Government's proposals, I do not recall their initiating a debate such as this when they had the opportunity to do so in government. The truth is that this is a service that needs to change. Things have moved on; the ability to deliver primary care has developed, and the various roles of the primary health care teams have changed. Those teams want to perform in a different way, and the Bill, together with the White Paper, takes the debate forward by light years.

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, I have had the benefit of going around the country listening to the ideas of all the primary health care professionals about how to take the service forward. I enjoyed that exercise. The Bill has been largely formed not by what Ministers thought should happen to primary care, but on the principles that were set out by primary health care professionals. I pay tribute to all those who were involved in the listening exercise and the exercise that followed it. Much hard work was put into it. I pay tribute both to every professional who attended and to officials in the Department and all the regions, who have been working vigorously to make the Bill a proposal that is fit to come before the House and be put into legislation over such a length of time.

The hon. Member for Dulwich made a point about NHS dentistry, which was not referred to in great detail in the debate, but which was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell). The answer to her question is that the Bill will provide, should dentists choose to use it, an entirely new and more flexible option of contracting with health authorities to provide dental health care. It was extremely unfair of her to quote selectively from what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has said about NHS dentistry. It is true that, in recent years, the overall volume of dentistry provided through the NHS has increased. It is also true that the number of dentists providing that treatment has increased, but the Government have never shied away from the proposition that, in certain regions, there are difficulties in the provision of NHS dentistry, which will be tackled through the Bill and through new arrangements.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Very quickly, may I support what my hon. Friend says? When there was a problem in my constituency in the village of Poynton and we made out an excellent case for the appointment of a salaried dentist by the family health service authority, as it was then, there was no problem in getting a salaried dentist appointed to ensure that dentistry was available under the NHS in my constituency.

Mr. Malone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for recognising that. That has happened in other ways, not least the access fund that was put in place by the Government last year and which we hope to develop.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury asked about GPs being employed in acute hospitals. Associated with that is the question of why we have suggested that they should not be employed by health authorities. Of course it is a recognised principle, which will hold if any arrangements are to be approved, that, if a scheme comes forward for approval, especially at the pilot stage, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and an apparent conflict of interest is set within the scheme, it would not be approved. However, it would be foolish to rule that out in principle.

If Labour Members chose, as I suppose that many of them do, to consider local hospitals, particularly accident and emergency departments and some of the admissions wards, where GP provision is increasing, they would find that GPs' occasional involvement in the acute sector is extremely important. There should be mechanisms in the Bill to allow that to happen, if it is appropriate. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked for a specific example of why that freedom needed to be kept in the Bill. That is a good reason why. Health authorities employing GPs would undermine the authorities' role as holders of the stage between all providers of health care. That is an important principle. Health authorities' role as arbiter would be weakened if they were to become a regular provider as well as a purchaser.

Mr. Burden: Will the Minister of State give way?

Mr. Malone: I do not intend to give way just now. I may give way later if I reach the point that the hon. Gentleman raised.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State rightly pointed out, if there is a defined and specific need, there is existing power in the legislation to deal with that.

On consultation and pilot proposals, I can assure the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that we expect the existing requirement for health authorities to consult community health councils and therefore patient representatives to remain in place. Of course we expect consultation to be carried out as widely as possible.

One thing I never quite understand about the Opposition is that they keep saying that the health service is too bureaucratic and castigating us for that, yet they always seek to build every last detail and possibility into primary legislation. Primary legislation should be about overall responsibilities and principles. In the health service, we are well accustomed to developing guidance that flows from primary legislation.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and other Labour Members asked about nurses' ability to make proposals as doctors and dentists do. Conservative Members have always said that nurses are key members of the primary health care team. Nurses have a role to play in future developments in primary care, and we recently gave expression to that belief in the proposals in our White Paper "Delivering the Future". We will ensure that the changes that we intend to make to the Bill allow nurses to play a full part in the new arrangements.

Although it was perhaps slightly off the subject of the Bill, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury made a point on paramedics. I should like to respond to that point—as the matter has recently been in the news—and make the position clear. There are a number of ways in which an unqualified person who turns up in an ambulance—on which he has attached a blue light and stripes, after having bought himself a yellow jacket—would find himself at some risk if he tried to provide patient care. If he were unqualified and did not hold a statutory certificate from the Secretary of State, he could be guilty of assault and subject to criminal charges. If he pretends to be medically qualified, he would fall foul of the Medical Act 1983. If he gives drugs to a patient, he would fall foul the Medicines Act 1968. So I hope that we can put to rest any possible doubts on that matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) rightly referred to the widening scope of services that are now being performed in primary care. That is of course one of the principles upon which we will be building with this legislation, and it will open up many frontiers for the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims), and particularly the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell), mentioned a point about pre-registration house officers and section 12 of the Medical Act 1983, and I listened extremely carefully to them. Although I do not want to give a specific undertaking during this debate, I understand that it is very important that training of future general practitioners takes place in the very best context.

That is a matter that we have been discussing—in the context of wider reforms and perhaps of other legislation—with the General Medical Council. If it is possible to meet the concerns of my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman while being satisfied about the type of training provided, I will try to do so. If at all possible, I will attempt to table an amendment in Committee to deal with that important point.

I was grateful to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey for his broad support for the Bill. He asked a question about pilots having a minimum time. Although I think that it is right that there should be a maximum time—which we have agreed to set in the legislation—it is difficult to determine the purpose of a minimum time. We will be developing evaluation criteria in wide consultation with the professions, and of course it will be necessary that a reasonable period is set. However, it is not right to set a specific minimum, whether it is 18 months or 12 months, because it should be based on principles.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) made a very good constituency speech in which he mentioned all the excellent developments—which can now perhaps be introduced more widely—that fundholding has brought to his constituency. The entire purpose of this legislation is to latch on to innovations that have occurred in fundholding—whereby GPs have been purchasing acute care with great innovation, harnessing that technique and applying it to primary care. He also asked for an assurance that health authorities would not be able to stifle schemes. That is why the legislation specifically provides that any scheme proposed by a general practitioner or NHS interest comes to my right hon. Friend Secretary of State and is not blocked.

The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) spoke of his concern about equity, although he conceded that fairness is being introduced since we started examining health allocations across the country. He complained about the pace of the reallocations, but everyone does. Those who lose on reallocations think that change is probably happening too quickly, whereas those who are potential gainers think that it is too slow. However, we must be careful when considering cash allocations to GP practices. The valid point was made by a Labour Member—I cannot remember who—that it is difficult to make an allocation on the small population of a GP practice base. We have to proceed, but we must do so with care. I am happy to take on board the principle of equitable distribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) was right to point to the strength of the pilot approach. She also talked about the role that can be played by pharmacists and nurses. That will be reinforced in the Bill.

The hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) is experienced in these matters. I was pleased to have his general support for the legislation and for the Bill's concept. Perhaps we will be able to examine some of his concerns should he be fortunate enough to serve on the Committee.

Some of my other hon. Friends supported the legislation and I welcome that. The hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) said that he came to praise the Bill. That seemed to be the general approach of the Opposition and I wish that they would translate that approach into specific action in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Simon Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Malone: I do not intend to give way, as I have only a short time left.

I always enjoy the speeches of the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South. He never lets a change of circumstances ruin a well-prepared speech. He spoke about a nightmare—his nightmare was Asda. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey was going a little too far when he said that arms dealers would be taking over primary care. Mr. Colin Brown of *The Independent* has a lot to answer for. He raised that hare at the outset of the debate on the Bill and it just shows that there has been concentration on the periphery of what the Bill is about. It is best that we now get down to the substance.

Mr. Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Malone: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman but I do not intend to give way. He can take me to task later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) spoke about the role of community nurses and local flexibility, which is exactly what the Bill is about. He made an important point about the attractions of primary care and what the Bill would do for that.

Underpinning the entire debate are a number of firm principles. Primary care must be for patients. It must provide the best service, as close to patients as possible and in the best possible circumstances. It is also about the provision of a satisfying career for those who provide primary care—whether they are doctors, nurses, midwives or practice staff. We have paved the way towards recognising their role with the provision of practice staff pensions. They must be able to fulfil their aspirations by providing care in a way that was not possible previously.

The Bill is about the detail set out in the White Paper. It is about recruitment and improving prospects for education. As I went, around the country, I heard the message that, with primary care developing as quickly as it was, it was essential that there should be more training and research in primary care. That point was mentioned by several hon. Members on both sides of the House and we have responded to it. We want to make the primary care environment a place in which people will be proud to practice and in which they can deliver standards of care to which they could only aspire some time ago.

What is most important is the simple message that these are voluntary principles. For anybody who is hoping to take up part I arrangements when the Bill reaches the statute book, I want to place firmly on the record the fact that this is voluntary. Anybody who chooses not to participate in the new arrangements will be able to move back to the arrangements with which they are familiar. That is the principle on which we have approached the Bill.

[Mr. Malone]

We have listened to what the professions have had to say and have iterated that in the legislation which we will now take forward. Primary care has served the country well for 50 years. It is time for a new generation of primary care to take that jewel in the crown of the national health service through to the next century. That will be done by the medical professions—doctors, nurses and all those who support them. It will be done by the Bill, which I am delighted to commend to the House.

I am sorry that the Opposition cannot reflect what was said by the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood who came to praise the Bill. Opposition Members tried to do that, but they are determined to oppose it tonight. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 253, Noes 314.

Division No. 73] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*

Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Clarke and Ms Angela Eagle.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Sir Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*

Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sebastian Coe and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Special Standing Committee.—[*Mr. Chris Smith.*]

The House divided: Ayes 271, Noes 312.

Division No. 74] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare

Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Sir Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*

Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexlyh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Sebastian Coe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (PRIMARY CARE) BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by Health Authorities or Health Boards in consequence of any provision of the Act about the making of payments of financial assistance for preparatory work, and

(b) any other increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 14th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

UNESCO

10.29 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): The petition is from members and supporters of the United Nations Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It addresses the present Government's position on UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. The petition, which has 6,135 signatures, reads as follows:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament Assembled

The Humble Petition of the People of the United Kingdom sheweth:

that we wish to register our deep concern at the Government's prolonged delay in resuming membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), thereby denying many UK individual citizens and professional and intellectual organisations essential participation in vital multilateral and bilateral cooperation in education, science, culture and communications at international level;

that the strengthening of the UN and its Specialised Agencies, through universality of membership, is fundamental for collective security; and while the UK (a permanent member of the Security Council) ignores its international obligations by continuing to stay out of UNESCO, the spirit of the UN Charter and the closely related UNESCO Constitution remain seriously weakened.

Wherefore your petitioners pray That your honourable House proceed and urge the Government to announce its decision to rejoin UNESCO and to start negotiations on all relevant details.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound will ever pray, &c.

To lie upon the Table.

Sally-Anne Messenger

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

10.31 pm

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): This is the sort of Adjournment debate that most hon. Members never like to introduce, simply because it involves deceit, lies, a cover-up and the unnecessary death of a young child.

Sally-Anne Messenger, my constituent, was born on 17 October 1992 and she was diagnosed as having Sandhoff's disease. The lifespan of someone with Sandhoff's disease is short, and they are usually expected to live only to late childhood or adolescence. In March 1994, Mr. and Mrs. Messenger took Sally-Anne to the United States of America to attend a hospital there that specialises in this disorder. It was confirmed there that Sally-Anne was suffering from mild symptoms and that she was coping particularly well with the disorder. Sally-Anne was due to return to the hospital in 1995, and it was hoped that she would be accepted to undergo clinical trials.

In 1994, Mr. and Mrs. Messenger purchased a holiday in Kos. The party consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Messenger, their two children and Mrs. Noble, the children's grandmother. At the same time, they purchased travel insurance through Intertravel Group plc. The insurance company was aware of Sally-Anne's condition before entering into the policy of insurance. The policy is quite standard and makes provision for the event of an insured person falling ill and requiring hospitalisation while on holiday. The medical insurers are Chubb Insurance, a member of the Association of British Insurers.

Before their departure, Mr. and Mrs. Messenger took Sally-Anne to their general practitioner, who confirmed that she was well enough to travel. The party departed on 8 October 1994 and arrived on Cos at about 6.45 on 9 October. They then had a long coach journey lasting about three hours. On Monday 10 October, Sally-Anne fell seriously ill. The Messengers took advice from a British doctor in the hotel and he gave them some medicine—but, quite honestly, it simply did not work, so Sally-Anne was taken to the local hospital. She was taken to the Kos hospital by taxi on the advice of the people named on the insurance claims form.

The doctors informed Mr. Messenger that Sally-Anne was dangerously ill and needed to go to Athens children's hospital. Mr. Messenger stated that he wanted to take her home to a UK hospital, but they told him that she would not make the journey. An Air Tours representative arrived at the hospital, and an aircraft was arranged to transfer Sally-Anne to Athens hospital.

Mr. Messenger returned to his hotel to collect his passport and money. Sally-Anne and Mrs. Noble went to Kos airport in an ambulance. Mr. Messenger met Sally-Anne at the airport. He was transported by the Air Tours representative. One can assume that the flight was arranged by agents appointed by the insurers. On arrival at Kos airport, Mr. Messenger asked the doctor who travelled with Sally-Anne in the ambulance how she was. He said that she had stopped convulsing and was now stable. Sally-Anne, Mr. Messenger and the doctor flew from Kos to Athens on Olympic Airways.

At Athens, an ambulance was provided to collect them from the airport and to take them to St. Sophia Athens district general hospital. There Sally-Anne was given medication, and an intravenous drip was set up. Mr. Messenger informed the hospital staff of her pre-existing condition. There was very little communication from them regarding her condition, and he was never asked to consent to any specific type of treatment.

Investigations were made. The emergency medical services may have been International Assistance Service or Athens Assist—it does not really matter. In any event, a representative from one of those agencies contacted Mr. Messenger and informed him that a doctor would be instructed to examine Sally-Anne on behalf of the insurance company.

Mr. Messenger contacted the emergency services to ask whether the rest of the family could join him in Athens so that they could be with Sally-Anne. He was informed that only the cost of his wife coming to Athens would be met by the insurance policy. Even though Mr. Messenger explained that Mrs. Messenger could not travel without her daughter because she was on the same passport, the insurance company was adamant that it could fund only the cost of Mr. Messenger travelling to Athens.

Sally-Anne was under observation in hospital. Mr. Messenger was not asked to take any decisions regarding her treatment. Sally-Anne's convulsions had been controlled and he understood that she was being treated for a respiratory tract infection.

On the evening of 14 October 1994, Mr. Messenger received a call from Athens Assist, informing him that he and Sally-Anne could now return to Kos and complete their holiday, or Sally-Anne could be repatriated to the UK to be admitted to a local hospital for further observation. Obviously—and sensibly—Mr. Messenger did not consider that Sally-Anne was well enough to travel to Kos to complete her holiday, and chose the safer option of having her repatriated to the UK and admitted to a local hospital for further observation.

Athens Assist arranged the flight. Mr. Messenger had no part in making any of the arrangements for Sally-Anne's repatriation, but was entirely in the hands of the insurance company. He was informed by the insurer's representatives that he would be leaving at midnight. He was not informed of any special arrangement that had been made.

Mr. Messenger telephoned his wife to inform her that they were leaving for England that night. He then informed the doctors who were on duty. They expressed surprise and did not appear to be aware that Sally-Anne was being repatriated to England. They asked Mr. Messenger whether he was going to have a medical escort. Mr. Messenger said that he did not know—no one had told him what the arrangements were. The doctors appeared concerned. They gave Mr. Messenger rectal valium and a syringe and advised him to use it if Sally-Anne had convulsions during the flight. It should not be forgotten that he had never administered that sort of treatment to his little girl before.

The story gets worse. One of the doctors then wrote out a letter in Greek and gave it to Mr. Messenger to give to the receiving doctor in England. Mr. Messenger and Sally-Anne were driven by car to Athens airport, as arranged by Athens Assist. They had to wait for one and a half hours at the airport before boarding the flight.

[Mr. Jerry Hayes]

Sally-Anne was clearly unwell. Although stabilised, she was unresponsive and very poorly. Mr. Messenger and Sally-Anne were allocated two seats on a charter flight—it was not a medical flight. The flight staff did not appear to know that they were carrying a sick, if not terminally sick, passenger until they saw Sally-Anne and expressed concern about how poorly she looked. On seeing her condition, one of the air hostesses offered Mr. Messenger additional seats so that Sally-Anne could lie down.

On arrival at Gatwick airport, Mr. Messenger and Sally-Anne had to go through customs in the usual way, even though she was terminally ill. Mr. Messenger had to ask a member of the airport staff to look after Sally-Anne while he collected his luggage. They were met by a car with a paramedic, and Sally-Anne was taken to Princess Alexandra hospital in my constituency. She was admitted to that hospital on 15 October. On 16 October, Sally-Anne began to have breathing difficulties. She was intubated and ventilated and then transferred to the intensive care unit. That same evening, she was transferred to St. Mary's intensive care unit in London.

On arrival at St. Mary's, Mr. Messenger contacted his wife to tell her to come home immediately, because Sally-Anne was critically ill. He also contacted IAS to inform the company of the situation. I shall not go into the details of the appalling problems that Mrs. Messenger had in getting a flight home. She got a flight home at 12.40 am. In the meantime, Mr. Messenger had been informed that Sally-Anne had severe neurological failure. A CT scan confirmed that she had a grossly swollen brain and raised intracranial pressure. Mr. Messenger was anxious for his wife to arrive and contacted IAS to find out when she would be arriving. During the telephone conversation, it became apparent that IAS had arranged for Mrs. Messenger to be driven to Princess Alexandra hospital in Harlow. Mr. Messenger explained that Sally-Anne had been transferred to St. Mary's in Paddington.

Despite aggressive treatment at St. Mary's, additional tests confirmed that brain stem death had occurred and that nothing further could be done. By the time Mrs. Messenger arrived, Sally-Anne was clinically dead. Obviously, that was extremely distressing. Mrs. Messenger had not been at the side of her dying child for a week, because of the insurance company's actions.

Initially, Mr. and Mrs. Messenger submitted a claim under their insurance policy for compensation for the curtailment of the holiday. The claim was met without dispute. However, as time went on, they began to ask questions. They wondered what could have happened to Sally-Anne, the little girl they loved and who had died. Investigations were made—at the expense of my constituents. I hope that they will forgive me for saying so, but they are not wealthy people. They are decent, ordinary people. Mrs. Messenger has pawned her jewellery. There is nothing on the walls in their house and they have no stereo, because they have spent all their money trying to find out what happened to their little girl.

I am coming to the most disgusting aspect of this case. The investigations showed that the system that is triggered on notifying the emergency number in the insurance policy appears to be that the IAS, which is based in the United Kingdom, appoints agents in Athens—in this case, Athens Assist—to obtain information and make any necessary arrangements, acting on instructions from IAS. IAS states that it has its own medical advisers based in the UK, who liaise closely with the doctors treating their insured before making any decisions about the insured's treatment or repatriation. IAS, in turn, takes instructions from its principal, Chubb Insurance, before committing any financial support. The bottom line is that any treatment or repatriation requiring expenditure under the policy must be authorised by IAS and Chubb.

In Sally-Anne's case, we understand that IAS instructed Athens Assist to deal with matters at the Greek end. Athens Assist in turn instructed a Greek doctor to liaise with Sally-Anne's treating doctors, to ascertain her condition and to report back. The doctor did not liaise with the hospital. We do not believe that there was ever any direct discussion between the medical staff at IAS and the treating doctors at Athens hospital. As regards the treatment that Sally-Anne received in Athens hospital, the House will appreciate that that is a different matter for litigation.

One must ask what requests for treatment were made to IAS. What instructions did IAS give regarding any request for treatment? It is apparent that a CT scan was never carried out. We do not know the reason, but it is possible that the treating doctors decided that a scan was no longer necessary, or that IAS indicated that it would not fund the cost. The CT scan was vital to assess Sally-Anne's neurological condition properly. If it had been performed earlier, treatment could have been available that might have saved the little girl's life.

We have obtained extracts from the medical reports, but I shall not go into the details: they are contradictory, if not downright fraudulent.

The little girl was repatriated to England. A number of questions must be asked. First, who made the decision that Sally-Anne should return to Kos? In the course of the investigations, the insurers disclosed copies of faxes that they received from Athens Assist. It is noteworthy that they did not disclose copies of the faxes detailing their instructions to Athens Assist.

It would appear that, on 13 October 1994, IAS received a fax from Athens Assist stating that Sally-Anne had been stabilised, that her spasms were due to her main disease—which is untrue—and that the prognosis was that she could be discharged in two days' time to continue her holiday on Kos island. On 14 October 1994, Athens Assist faxed IAS with the information that Sally-Anne remained on medication and required a further 10 days' monitoring in the hospital.

At the same time, Athens Assist requested instructions regarding repatriation. Mr. and Mrs. Messenger were informed orally by a member of staff at Athens Assist that a Dr. Hamid from IAS instructed that Sally-Anne should be discharged and returned to Kos. Those instructions caused concern, as further information received suggested that Sally-Anne was too ill to return to Kos and required further monitoring in hospital.

At some point, instructions were received via Athens Assist that Sally-Anne could be repatriated. We understand that instructions were given over the telephone, and not committed to fax. There must have been a breakdown in communication, as the message given to Mr. Messenger was that he could return to Kos with Sally-Anne or that she could be repatriated to a hospital in the UK. Confronted with such a bizarre choice

and under terrible pressure, Mr. Messenger chose the safer option—for Sally-Anne to be repatriated to their local hospital and eventually that she should go to Paddington.

I will now deal with the mode of transfer to the UK. The decision was reached by IAS, which states that the decision was made by its medical advisers following close liaison with the treating doctors, but no evidence has been disclosed to us to support that. The implications are to the contrary, and the cynical conclusion that we must draw—we have it in writing—is that a decision regarding a dying child was reached on purely economic grounds, based on a false belief that Sally-Anne's symptoms were due to a pre-existing condition which was fatal in any event. The insurance company appears to have taken the view that the mode of transportation would make little difference to her condition.

In contrast, Athens hospital states that Mr. Messenger gave an assurance that the insurance company had arranged a special flight with a medical escort. That was not true. Needless to say, Mr. Messenger did not provide that information, but it suggests that there was no direct and meaningful liaison between the IAS and the treating doctors.

As to the decision to refuse to allow Mrs. Messenger and other members of the party to join Sally-Anne in Athens, the IAS simply states that no request was ever made. We understand that, if a patient is to be repatriated without a medical escort, the hospital must issue a fitness to fly certificate. Initially, IAS insisted that a certificate was issued. However, upon our pressing the point and requesting sight of the fitness to fly certificate, it eventually conceded that a certificate had not been issued.

It was then revealed that a discharge certificate had been issued by the hospital, presumably transferring the care of the patient, but no discharge certificate was among the records sent by Athens hospital or referred to in the records. Mr. and Mrs. Messenger were informed that the discharge certificate was sent to Chubb Insurance, together with the invoices and other documents relating to Sally-Anne's treatment at Athens hospital. Eventually, in the latter part of 1996, Chubb provided a copy of what it claims is the original discharge certificate. The copy is virtually illegible, and we suspect that the document is totally bogus.

It is not clear who signed the document, as the signatures cannot be distinguished. However, it is clear that Mr. Messenger is not on the certificate and, as such, he cannot be said to have consented to or authorised the discharge of his daughter into his care. Further investigations revealed that the discharge certificate was completed by a staff member at Athens Assist and signed by administrative staff at Athens hospital in 1995, months after Sally-Anne had died. Consideration was then given to the arrangements that were made with Princess Alexandra hospital in my constituency. The senior house officer on duty at the time has provided evidence that can only damage Chubb Insurance.

It has been put to the insurer that it has breached its obligations to the insured under the terms of the insurance contract. Despite the traumatic death of a tiny child, the parents' suffering and the total incompetence of the insurance company, the breach has been denied and the insurer has refused to offer compensation. Mr. and Mrs. Messenger, driven by the need to know what happened to their daughter and the need to ensure that insurance companies provide proper cover, have continued to try to discover what really occurred.

I could go on and on about what has occurred with the insurance company and with the insurance ombudsman. My hon. Friend the Minister will reply to the debate in a moment. He knows the facts of the case. He knows that the insurance ombudsman appointed a lady to deal with the case. She works four days a week and she is dealing with 50 other cases. She begins work at 10.30 am and finishes at 4.30 pm. The Messengers have put themselves in hock and into debt. They are decent, honourable people who are merely trying to find out what happened to the child they loved and who died. They have been put through hell.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to investigate what I always thought was a reputable insurance company. Most of us have Chubb locks in our homes: I thought that they were decent people, but clearly not. I ask my hon. Friend to investigate what happened with the ombudsman, who I am sure meant well. All the investigations were undertaken by my constituents, the Messengers; yet months elapsed and they were offered—not that money is important—£1,700. That is an insult.

10.55 pm

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Anthony Nelson): No one could fail to be moved by the tragic case that my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) has brought to the attention of the House. We respect him for doing so, and for finding the time and the opportunity to present the case sensitively and forcefully.

Before responding to the points made by my hon. Friend on this sad and distressing case, I should like to extend my deepest sympathy to the Messenger family. To lose a child is terrible, but to do so in such circumstances and so far from home must be devastating. I must also declare straight away that I am unable to comment on some of the substance of the case because it remains unresolved and may be the subject of further legal action. I know that this will inevitably be frustrating for the Messenger family, and I am truly sorry for that, but I am bound by the constraints of law.

I have been in touch with the insurance ombudsman, and I have sought to establish the facts of the case. Since he first began to consider this case, he has received extensive evidence from both parties to the dispute, all of which has been taken into account. He has made a number of further inquiries in the light of evidence and the submissions that he received. On the basis of that evidence, he has made a number of decisions, some of which involve awards to Mr. and Mrs. Messenger. Those have been communicated to the couple.

No one is in any doubt that this has been a difficult and complicated case. The ombudsman has assured me that every effort has been made to bring the matter to a conclusion as quickly as possible. He has agreed with the Messengers that the repatriation of Sally-Anne to the United Kingdom was poorly handled. He has accepted that the child should have been accompanied by a qualified medical adviser, that the insurer's agents should have made Sally-Anne's medical notes available in English translation, and that the insurer made a number of administrative errors.

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

I cannot comment on the amount of compensation that the ombudsman has awarded, save to repeat what my hon. Friend said: no amount of money can make up for the loss of a child.

The ombudsman has also quite properly pointed out to Mr. and Mrs. Messenger that, because the case concerns the recollection of events most of which were very stressful, and because no contemporaneous record is available, it may be more appropriate to a court of law. In a court of law there is a process for discovery of documents, and witnesses must give evidence under oath and are subject to cross-examination. I do not want to add to the trauma and distress that Mr. and Mrs. Messenger have obviously experienced, but I believe that they should seek legal advice on that option, including the possibility of obtaining legal aid to pursue the matter further.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, Ministers cannot intervene in the grant of legal aid in individual cases, but I can bring the points raised to the attention of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Lord Chancellor, who can request a report on the case from the chief executive of the Legal Aid Board. My hon. Friend will also be aware that the Government are reforming the legal aid scheme to target resources at the most needy and deserving cases.

I should stress that Mr. and Mrs. Messenger are in no way bound by the ombudsman's decisions. Although his decision is binding on the insurance company, which must pay compensation if it is awarded, the policyholder still has the right to pursue any dispute through the courts if it is felt that the complaint has not been adequately addressed. I should also point out that the Secretary of State has no powers to intervene in individual disputes between a policyholder and an insurance company.

My hon. Friend has expressed concern about the time that it has taken to resolve the dispute. I appreciate his frustration, and that of the Messenger family, over the time that it has taken to reach decisions; nevertheless, it is clear that this has not been a typical case. Indeed, the ombudsman has stated that it is one of the most distressing and complicated with which he has had to deal. His office has received no fewer than 136 pages of submission and 39 telephone calls from the Messenger family.

The voluntary scheme has one major advantage over the courts or a statutory regime: it allows the ombudsman to take a rather broader view in arriving at a decision. He is not bound by the strict letter of the law; nor is he hampered by the prospect of judicial review. Because the scheme has the support of the vast majority of the industry, the ombudsman can take a common-sense approach, which, if anything, is biased in favour of the insured party.

Time does not permit me to respond to the points raised by my hon. Friend in all the detail that I would like, but perhaps I may be allowed to say this. No arbitration scheme can ever hope to resolve all disputes to the satisfaction of both sides. Nevertheless, I believe that the insurance ombudsman scheme is, in general, a very good scheme, which commands the support both of the public and of the insurance industry. However, nothing that the ombudsman or anyone else could do could make up for the distress that Mr. and Mrs. Messenger have so obviously suffered. My heart goes out to them in their sorrow, and I thank my hon. Friend for drawing the case to the attention of the House in such a sensitive and forceful way. I assure him that I have taken careful note of his comments.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 February 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Public Research Establishments

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

[Relevant documents: First report from the Science and Technology Committee of Session 1994–95, on the Efficiency Unit Scrutiny of Public Sector Research Establishments (HC 19), the Government's response thereto (HC 805), the fifth report from the Science and Technology Committee of Session 1995–6 and the first report of Session 1996–97 on the Prior Options Reviews of Public Sector Research Establishments (HC 643 and HC 71-I) and the Government's response thereto (HC 291 of Session 1996–97).]

9.34 am

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this debate in the House on the subjects connected with the work of the Select Committee on Science and Technology. The debate is about the inquiry into the prior options reviews, which was recently concluded, and to which the Government have now responded, although the response was not available when the Liaison Select Committee met to discuss whether a debate was appropriate. It is indeed appropriate, because of the importance of the subject and the reviews that have recently been undertaken.

Prior options reviews are not part of the everyday parlance of the House and it is therefore important that we establish what we are talking about. Prior options reviews are most closely associated with the next steps reforms that the Government have undertaken in recent years. The reviews decide whether institutes should be abolished, privatised, made into next steps agencies or retained in the parent Department. Significant questions are asked. Is the function needed? Must the public sector be responsible for the function? Must the public sector provide the function itself? What is the scope for rationalisation? How will the function be managed? The reviews covered almost all the institutes and institutions, via the research councils or directly through the Government, and therefore encompassed the entire range of scientific activities undertaken outwith academia.

Each executive agency in the programme is subject to five-yearly reviews, in which the prior options questions are addressed. The reviews were not designed for scientific institutions and insufficient adjustments may have been made to fit them for the purpose. That was one of the reasons why the Select Committee felt it necessary to undertake the inquiry. The Select Committee was not wholly convinced that the inquiry would be an appropriate step, but it was clear—as the reviews took longer to report than expected—that the scientific community had become deeply uneasy about what was going on. For that reason, the Select Committee undertook its inquiry.

Our conclusions are important and also significant. The Select Committee has always accepted that some review of public sector research establishments was justified. After all, the bodies under review cost some £690 million a year. If the 1992 Levene Stewart "Review of Allocation, Management and Use of Government Expenditure on Science and Technology" was correct, the research laboratories of many Government Departments were ripe for review. One of the recommendations of our most recent report was that all Government research establishments should be reviewed at least once every five years.

It concerned the Select Committee that the review process was seen as hasty and repetitive and as inappropriately applied to research council institutes, which can be central to the research councils' mission. Moreover, in most cases, the institutes are reviewed regularly by their parent bodies—as is only sensible—and the research councils have a good record in closing those that are unsatisfactory.

The Select Committee was also concerned about the openness of the procedure. The Government began well by placing guidelines in the Library and by participating in a meeting to discuss the reviews which was held at, and under the auspices of, the Royal Society. However, as the reviews progressed, that openness ceased. The Government announced that

"full independence from the public sector"

would be desirable for the Institute of Arable Crops Research, the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, the John Innes Centre and the Silsoe Research Centre. It was not clear exactly what this would imply, but the Government commissioned further work on the matter from Sir Peter Levene.

The terms of reference of the committee were not published. This—together with the fact that it was thought to be looking at establishments that had not yet been reviewed—led to great uneasiness. In the course of the Committee's inquiry, it became clear that Sir Peter's task was primarily concerned with pension provision and pension liabilities. Frankly, I do not understand—nor does the Committee—why a clear announcement of the nature of the inquiry could not have been made at the outset. Much unease and loss of morale could thus have been easily avoided.

Another matter that troubled the Committee was that the reports of the review teams were not published. The Government's view is that these, and the steering group reports, constituted advice to Ministers which would "not normally be published". This is one of the issues that Select Committees of whatever persuasion come up against from time to time—the blanket of "advice to Ministers". It may be the case, but there seems to be little reason for denying publication, particularly since the earlier efficiency scrutinies had been published.

There may have been concern that the Government might be criticised for rejecting the advice of the reports. Frankly, I doubt that, because my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology is not someone who would be deterred by that, and he would be encouraged and would probably accept the advice. Although the Government

[Sir Giles Shaw]

have been criticised for the scale and scope of the efficiency scrutiny, they have not, as far as I am aware, been criticised for rejecting any of the advice.

The unwillingness to release the reports increased the scientific community's suspicion of the Government's motives. It also meant that the Committee could not discount the complaints that the findings of the reviews and the steering groups were being overridden. This lack of openness is particularly regrettable, given the White Paper's undertaking that advice from the Committee and expert groups working on specific issues would normally be published.

Decisions were taken on some Government research establishments before the current round of reviews. AEA Technology—which the Committee visited—the Laboratory of the Government Chemist and the National Physical Laboratory were to be privatised. On 29 January, the Government announced the result of the current set of reviews in broad outline. ADAS—formerly known as the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service—and the Building Research Establishment are to be privatised, as was already known, and as had been recommended by the efficiency scrutiny.

Some of the laboratories in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and some in the Scottish Office are to become executive agencies, or companies limited by guarantee. Almost all research council institutes are to remain as they are, subject to efficiency improvements. We are promised that the director general of the research councils will have oversight of these efficiency improvements.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is there any difference between the treatment of institutions in Scotland under the Scottish Office and institutions in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Sir Giles Shaw: I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman because the Committee did not investigate Scottish institutions, but we might well consider his question in a further assessment. This will be an on-going process, as he is well aware.

The reviews have more worrying implications. The Government's policy has been to substitute meddling from central Departments with the discipline of the marketplace. The result of those reviews seems to have been to increase the meddling from the centre, even though market disciplines are in place. The Government response to our recent report tells us that research council institutes

"account for some £220 million annually of public funds from the Research Councils and from other Government departments and other public bodies."

That is less than a third of the total involved. Much of that money is placed in the institutes as contracts from Government Departments and other public bodies—that is to say, the Department concerned has concluded that no one else from whom it can obtain the same research is better or cheaper.

Research councils have always had the independence of their charters. In 1993, the Government reformed the system so that each of the new research councils had a chairman drawn from business, and a new mission. The councils were given a fresh remit by the White Paper which emphasised the need to enhance wealth creation and the quality of life. That seems entirely appropriate and is an excellent example of the action that the Government have taken to restore and develop the structure within which science can compete.

In the Government response to the Committee's most recent report, the prior options reviews were justified on the ground that the Science and Technology Act 1965 gave the Secretary of State power to give directions to the research councils, and that the White Paper

"gave the Director General of the Research Council specific responsibilities for assisting Ministers in ensuring the successful and high quality operation of the Research Councils".

That is all very laudable, and the White Paper agreed to give the DGRC responsibilities. But it also suggested that the director general would be advised by a small standing group of independent experts, selected to allow him or her to draw upon the requisite scientific, economic, industrial and management expertise. Frankly, this has not been carried out.

There is an irony in this process. In setting up the next steps agencies—with which prior options reviews are most closely associated—the Government were devolving power away from the centre of Departments and giving it to those responsible for operations who, it was assumed, would know their business best. The research councils had substantial independence before the process began. The outcome of the reviews appears to have increased central oversight of non-departmental public bodies, rather than reduced it. That is one of the prime criticisms that we make.

We are not the only ones to make that criticism. Dr. Michael Elves—a business man who knows the public sector system well—said that UK public sector science

"should be recognised for what it is—a living and growing organism that can be all too easily snuffed out and which would take a long time to re-build, if indeed it ever could be."

That is a fair warning.

The existence of the Select Committee on Science and Technology will be a bulwark to prevent this kind of thing from happening again, and our recent activities have qualified us for this role. A large proportion of Government-funded science flows through the research councils and institutes, and it is well within the remit of a Committee established by this House to monitor its effectiveness and the suitability of its structure. Colleagues will recall that the Committee's first report to the House concerned the structure of the Office of Science and Technology.

The Committee's concerns go wider, and we need to develop the OST as Parliament's instrument to ensure that we can monitor and measure the pulse and heartbeat of British science. The economic health of the nation depends on that, and the very survival of our people depends on the development of scientific solutions to our human problems. The Committee's concern with reviews of this sort is that this debilitating matter has had severe effects on the morale of the science base. Prior options is only the most recent review, but it is by no means the only one that has been effected. For example, there was the 1992 review of allocation, management and use of Government expenditure, and the 1993

multi-departmental scrutiny. Following those, it was not surprising that the latest review received a frosty reception.

The Committee must have a role in overseeing what goes on, and we must ensure and advise on the effectiveness of the instruments that the Government set up. Our research councils have served us well, and I believe that the Government's structure for science has served the nation well also.

It is our judgment that the Select Committee on Science and Technology will serve the House well. As I come to the end of my 23 years here, I am delighted to think that the Committee will continue to be a satisfactory achievement for all who serve on it.

What really makes a Select Committee work, however, is the commitment of the individual members and the wonderful contribution of the Clerks. Our Clerk served the Committee outstandingly: every good creation should have its Eve, and we certainly had one. At the end of the day, the effectiveness with which the House can use the information supplied by Select Committees will be its greatest achievement.

9.49 am

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): All members of the Select Committee on Science and Technology will want to thank the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) for the way in which he has chaired it in its first complete Session of Parliament. He has been fair and patient, and he has been loyal to the Committee in everything that he has done. The Committee will also want to join him in thanking the staff and all who have given evidence. I believe that the next Parliament will want to continue what is perhaps a slight anomaly within the structure of departmental Committees but is fully justified by the work that has been done.

The prior options review process was a time-wasting indulgence, as the Chairman of the Committee said, but it was an indulgence specifically of the Deputy Prime Minister's prejudice against science, against the public sector, and therefore against public sector science. It caused prolonged uncertainty and demoralisation in services tackling key problems on which the Government have conceded that they have failed and are no longer trusted by the public—most dramatically in the handling of BSE and food safety.

The research establishments reviewed included the Veterinary Laboratories Agency—the principal vehicle for research into BSE—and the Institute of Food Research. The three key questions posed in the review were as follows: were the functions of the establishments needed; should they remain in the public sector; and should they retain their separate existence?

There was no sense in asking the questions unless there was the option, as implied by the title of the review, of expecting the answer to be no. The eventual answers arrived at by the Minister were yes in every case, except for the Agricultural Development Advisory Service and the Building Research Establishment, which were not research council institutes.

The questions had only to be asked, after the repeated reviews to which the research establishments had already been subjected, to demonstrate that they were the wrong questions. Rather than wasting time on the wrong questions, I should like to ask some better questions and to suggest some better answers that the new Government will have to consider after the election.

In announcing plans for a food safety adviser, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food emphasised the adviser's freedom to comment publicly on policy. That is of course necessary, but unfortunately the problem is more serious than that. There is no problem with a certainty that has to be presented; the problem is how to handle uncertainty, genuine doubt and differences of opinion.

In an excellent review in *Nature* this week of John Lemon's book, "Scientific Uncertainty and Environmental Problem Solving", Tim O'Riordan says that there are four types of scientific uncertainty, raised by the following questions: what is the problem; how does one observe it; what are the odds; and what is one after, anyway?

Ministers need to understand the different kinds of uncertainty, because they unavoidably contribute to them. Framing the problem is not trivial. The question whether BSE can cross the species barrier was a good question at one stage but is not necessarily the right question today. The question whether human activity has any effect on climate may have been the right question in 1990, but is it the right question in 1997?

There is a further uncertainty about how one observes and models a system—how one sets up the logical structure within which to look for answers. The models may be biological systems on which it is possible to experiment in the laboratory, computer simulations within which the evidence is structured, or other combinations of evidence and analysis.

The odds, the statistical uncertainty, are the kind of uncertainty that people usually have in mind when they talk about risk analysis; but that is only one aspect of uncertainty, and not the most difficult.

The final uncertainty concerns what the Government are after anyway. It is not a matter only of the declared purposes or even the hidden agenda, but of the issues that inevitably arise when different parties consider the attitudes of other parties and the passage of time eventually resolves the situation.

Decision-theoretic uncertainty is not high-falutin' mathematics—the calculation of minimax solutions or expected utility, as one finds in the textbooks—but political reality; it may be sordid, but it is real. Is the Minister concerned with avoiding blame for outcomes within his period of office, as in an E. coli outbreak?

Obviously, everyone, including the Minister, is concerned with minimising the effects, but is it a matter in which the effects may be seen within a matter of weeks, as with E. coli; is it a matter of climate effects that will not be measurable for another 20 years; or is the Minister dealing not with reality as we ordinarily understand it, but with perceptions of reality in the public mind; not with trade, competitiveness and the current balance—the preoccupations of the Chancellor—but with sentiment in the foreign exchange markets?

The four kinds of uncertainty are not independent. Problem formulating, modelling, statistical uncertainty and decision-theoretic uncertainty all interact. Each has to be reconsidered in the light of changes in the others. Institutionally, each has to be provided for, possibly separately, but certainly differently; each has to be tackled, but each has to communicate with the institutions and the people tackling the others.

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

On the first kind of uncertainty—what is the problem?—anyone can join in, but the Minister has a duty at all times to give his view. Unless the Government's view of what the problem is comes out clearly, neither the public debate nor the practical work of the scientists will be given a clear steer about the direction in which they need to go.

Defining the problem is not a trivial exercise, and the formulation is likely to change as the problem develops and as people change their views. When the stakes are high, as they often are, and a "play safe" strategy is required, ethical and social consensus positions will rightly be pressed and the Minister must handle them.

On modelling uncertainty, a wide set of scientific issues arises. There will be analytically elegant models for which it is very difficult to produce, or even conceive of, serious empirical testing. The currently fashionable model is the market. The market will decide: it will decide the length of traffic jams on the M25, for example.

Then there will be the prescriptive advocacy of the farmers, of the oil-producing countries or of Greenpeace, defending preset conclusions; and there will be closed shops in particular scientific sub-disciplines. Scientific peer groups will have to fight it out, and be seen to fight it out, with the victor possibly changing when the problem changes.

Typically, the institutions pursuing their different models will need to be tested and compared by another kind of institution, able to join in the technical argument, but standing above it and not pontificating. It is unlikely that the market or an operational arm of Government would be able to fulfil the testing and comparison role.

With problems and methods better formulated and reviewed, the statistical and risk analysis can be pressed all the harder, but it is not the only sort of uncertainty. Here come the hazards of the million-to-one-against events that occur with monotonous regularity, revealing the misformulation of the problem specification in the first place. The need is not so much for an institution to do the risk analysis, because the problem formulators and modellers will want to do that themselves, but for a sufficiently wide audience to understand the argument and its limitations and dependencies, not just in general but in its application to the point at issue.

That leads on to the decision-theoretic uncertainty. What are the Minister, the media or the public after? It is a palpably obvious question in politics, but a contortionist's nightmare in game theory and decision theory. Does the Minister think that I think that he thinks that they think that there is nothing in it, so they would not move anyway? The limitations and the realities of politics need to be understood, as well as the balances of scientific uncertainty. The whole process of decision making becomes much more effective and efficient if sufficient people in government and politics can handle the different sorts of scientific uncertainty. That is why the work of the Select Committee is so important.

At the time of the last general election, I said that we had learnt nothing about methods of government since the 1960s. So I got Neil Kinnock's and John Smith's agreement that the Office of Science and Technology should look, for the Government, at research on how Government should behave, as well as at Government research into how other people should behave.

A free-standing Office of Science and Technology—a pale shadow of the proposal—has come and gone. Now, of course, it is perfectly reasonable for the Opposition to accept present Government methods as a point of departure. But, whoever wins the election, the present methods are not sustainable. They must improve or, under the pressures of continuing social and technological change, they will deteriorate further.

10.1 am

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in the debate. I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), but I will not follow his analysis in detail. I certainly support what he had to say about my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), the Chairman of the Select Committee. I am a fairly new member—not necessarily the best behaved—but he has certainly been patient and an excellent Chairman. Sadly, I too am retiring at the next general election, but I certainly support the remarks of both hon. Members about the importance of an active Science and Technology Select Committee to the nation. I hope that my hon. Friend and anyone else in authority will take that into account.

I have two themes. The first is the effect of the prior options process in my local area and in my constituency, which contains many people who work in research institutes and who have an interest in what has been happening. If time permits, I shall comment on the importance of science and scientific research and the relationship between that and public attitudes to science. Again, that is relevant to the debate.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his response to my many letters. I was surprised that I had written so often to him about prior options. When I went through the papers, I realised how grateful I should be to him for his assiduousness in getting back to me quickly with replies on the various matters. I pay tribute to his commitment to science. He has written a number of articles recently. One was in the *New Scientist* and I have it before me. I agree with his general approach to these matters. He pays tribute in the article to Britain's excellent science base, saying:

"With 1 per cent. of the world's population, Britain carries out 6 per cent. of its research, produces 8 per cent. of all science publications".

We certainly punch above our weight in science. I may have a little more to say about public attitudes at the end of my remarks.

I also support the commitment of my hon. Friend the Minister to education and higher education as it relates to the science base. After all, I spent 23 years teaching science in the schools—it is amazing, and I can hardly believe it now. When I hear or read about my hon. Friend paying tribute to the importance of science education, I can only say, "Hear, hear!"

I will not say much about the Select Committee report and the Government response to it as my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey has dealt with that in some detail and, basically, I agree with his remarks. I must simply pose the question, where is the memorandum on the rationale for the recent Government decisions? It is difficult to find all the information. I hope that my hon. Friend will tell me when it will appear in the Library. Indeed, it may even be there this morning, but I have not seen it.

The only other thing that I have to say about all this documentation before us this morning is to make an appeal. I have read the Select Committee report—I suppose I must

bear some responsibility for it—and the Government response. There is not much science in it. As a scientist, all this would be much more interesting if we could get a little more science into the paperwork that affects the administration and workings of science in this country. Other countries do so. I suspect that if, we read the equivalent documents in France or Germany, we would find more science in them. I spend a lot of time wondering why the Select Committee does not write much about science itself, and the Government must take their share of that criticism.

East Anglia has the fastest growing population in the United Kingdom and, as hon. Members will agree, it has an important scientific base, a high level of research and development and a skilled work force. There is no question, therefore, but that what is happening in Norwich in relation to science is important and the Committee has taken account of that. I welcome the prior options review as it affects my area at this stage, and I welcome the retention of the Central Science Laboratory in Norwich. That was the correct decision, and I welcome it. As I said, East Anglia has a high scientific profile and devotes a higher proportion of its gross domestic product to research and development than any other region.

In Norwich, although not in my constituency, we have the John Innes Centre, the Institute of Food Research and the Central Science Laboratory. Also, many people who work at the University of East Anglia have connections with research institutes in other parts of the country. Indeed, I have had some correspondence from Dr. Phillip Williamson, who is a constituent of mine, about the Centre for Coastal and Marine Sciences—another of the institutes affected by our discussions. Dr. Williamson also gave evidence to the Select Committee, and he highlighted the concerns in his letters to me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey said that concerns were raised by this process, which perhaps should not have been so acute, as I think hon. Members on both sides of the House would agree. Dr. Williamson referred to that in his correspondence. He talked about costs, staff morale and the fate of national data centres within Natural Environment Research Council laboratories. He raised a number of issues that are relevant. The scientists for whom he spoke were concerned about the process, but I think that my hon. Friend the Minister is aware of that and will no doubt take note of it.

Because of my interest in institutions in Norwich, I have had representations from the National Farmers Union, which is concerned about the quality of research in agriculture and its continuance and from the trade unions. It is fair to say that all those representations were on the same theme and for that reason there is no need for me to elaborate too much. Their concerns were much the same.

I shall quote a letter that I wrote to my hon. Friend the Minister some time in March last year:

"Under the existing system, agriculture benefits from effective, multi-disciplinary research conducted within the framework of a national strategy.

The transfer of the John Innes Centre (and of other Research Council Institutes) to 'university ownership'—

I was not clear what that meant—

"would run the risk of diminishing the level of scientific interchange and of exposing the work of such Research Council Institutes to the shorter-term priorities involved in seeking a financial return. The impetus for basic research would be weakened with less effective spending and more duplication of facilities, research and skills. There would also be likely to be a deterrent effect upon the career structures of scientists in such centres given the prevalence of short-term contracts for university research staff."

I quote that to highlight the fact that the NFU was concerned about the prior options review. My quotation summarised its concerns.

My final local point concerns the university of East Anglia which has been interested in the process, not least because of its proximity to the John Innes Centre, the Institute of Food Research and the Central Science Laboratory. Unsurprisingly, I had considerable correspondence with the university's vice-chancellor, Dame Elizabeth Esteve-Coll. I do not know how this squares with the NFU's idea of university ownership or whatever it was. I did not quite follow the connection, so perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister can enlighten me.

The theme that emerged from the correspondence was that the university was keen that there should be

"a vision for the creation of a federation based on the Institutes and the University which could form the major UK centre for food science, food analysis and food safety."

Obviously, the university was concerned about the future of the CSL, with which I have already dealt, and with more general points, which I will not elaborate further. However, I think that the university will be happy with where we are now. The Government were sensible to let the matters stand where they are.

I hope that the debate that has been opened up between the university, the research institutes and the Government can be continued positively. I am trying to be brief, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister has picked up my point and can say that that will happen. If he can do that, there is no need for me to elaborate further my local points. *[Interruption.]* I am doing my best to be brief, but much has been happening in Norwich on this issue.

To summarise my remarks about prior options, I shall quote from the recent note produced by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, which states:

"care must be taken if 'pulling up the plant too often to examine its roots' is not to affect the ability of the Research Councils to maintain the long-term vitality of the science and engineering base, by diverting management time and Science Budget funds to the inevitable legal and administrative tasks involved. The Government on the other hand wishes to reduce to a minimum work carried out in the public sector and sees the additional prior options process as a critical part of that policy."

That sums it up well. There have been real concerns and I support those that have been raised.

I do not have time to talk about the public understanding of science. I refer hon. Members to Melvyn Bragg's recent article in *The Times*. I had thought that the two cultures went out after CP Snow's books, which I read, but sadly they have not. Melvyn Bragg's article says it all. Our country still has a problem with its culture and attitudes to science. I would love to talk more about it but I shall not. I hope that people will read that article and that my hon. Friend the Minister will take note of the serious issues that it raises.

10.13 am

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Unlike the previous three speakers, who are retiring, I hope to return to the House after the general election. I wish to place on record my grateful thanks for their work. I have found the

[Dr. Lynne Jones]

work on the Select Committee tremendously enjoyable. This debate has shown that there is complete agreement on the report.

I regard my work on the Science and Technology Select Committee as the must useful work that I do in this building, largely because the Committee approaches its work consensually. We take evidence, examine issues objectively and reach conclusions. Almost always, we find that, irrespective of our political affiliations, we agree. I contrast that with the work in this Chamber, where we are at one another's throats. The adversarial nature of debates diminishes our Parliament and does not lead to good government. If we had more of the Select Committee approach in the legislative process, this might be a much better governed country.

As recently as last night, the Government had the opportunity to refer the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill to a Special Standing Committee, which would have enabled it to go through such a process. However, they refused. I hope that the new Government after the general election will consider the use of more Special Standing Committees so that we can get more agreement in the House and better government.

The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) adequately outlined the Committee's concerns about the prior options review and the efficiency scrutiny, so I do not propose to go over that. I sound a slight note of disagreement with the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who said we should do more science in our Committee. While this report is largely about the organisation and administration of science, we have recently conducted a major inquiry into human genetics, which was full of science and very interesting. We produced recommendations that the Government first rejected, and then accepted after we went back to them. That shows the Committee's effectiveness.

I was also treated to the delights of particle physics and astronomy during our inquiry into P Parc. Those areas of science are exciting. If more publicity was given to them, there would be more public interest in science and in our scientific endeavours, which are so important for our economic well-being.

The scrutiny was supposed to lead to greater efficiencies. Our report makes it clear that we do not feel that that was the result. The scrutiny has led to much disruption in a community which, as the hon. Member for Norwich, North said, the Minister accepted in his *New Scientist* article was one of the most cost-effective producers of research among G7 countries. If we are so cost-effective, we must wonder why it was necessary to go through the reviews, which have led not to efficiencies but to inefficiencies.

For example, the Medical Research Council has not been able to replace the director of its reproductive biology unit in Edinburgh, who left last year. The Central Science Laboratory stated:

"It is regrettable that political considerations led to the retention of CSL's Food Science laboratory in Norwich when the clear business case was for it to be integrated"—

with the new facility at York—

"releasing savings of over £1 million a year."

The efficiency scrutiny has wasted £1 million a year.

Mr. Dalyell: To reinforce my hon. Friend's comment, the decision led in Edinburgh to outrage in informed circles in the university.

Dr. Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for reinforcing my point.

The Institute of Arable Crops Research says that more than 60 per cent. of its staff have contracts of less than three years, compared with 10 per cent. in 1981. That means that staff spend much time applying for money and submitting proposals.

The submission to our inquiry from the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists states:

"inefficiencies are on the increase as more and more scientists are drawn into procuring and managing contract funds and hunting for sponsorship deals."

That is not efficiency. Senior scientists can spend up to 40 per cent. of their time applying for grants, writing progress reports and reviewing other colleagues' proposals.

I hope that we will learn from the review and that we will not repeat the mistakes made in it. I want to spend a few minutes discussing the outcome and why we are happy with it. It means that most of the research institutes will remain in the public sector. Perhaps the main reason why privatisation did not occur was because of the problems surrounding the so-called crystallisation of pension rights. At present, in public bodies, there is no funded pension scheme—there is a pay-as-you-go pension scheme funded out of the research councils' budgets. Were the institutes to be privatised, they would have to move to a funded scheme and the Government would have to pay over a lump sum to fund the pension liabilities.

It is ironic that, in the long run, it makes no difference at all to the taxpayer whether there is a one-off lump sum of £100 million, which was the figure quoted, or there are annual contributions from the taxpayer that are, in effect, the financing cost of that £100 million. However, that was the major stumbling block, which highlights the nonsensical arrangements for public finance in this country. The Treasury rules basically say that, if the Government borrow money for investment, it is bad; whereas, if the private sector borrows for the same purpose, that is acceptable or even good. The issue of pensions shows the ridiculous nature of the public sector rules. The sooner we move to having a general government financing deficit, separate from borrowing for investment, the sooner we will have more effective public services.

It is quite wrong when the Government borrow for consumption. We currently have a public sector borrowing requirement of about £26 billion, which has been used to finance consumption—mainly to pay for the high costs of unemployment. That sort of borrowing is to be deplored, but, had the same sum been borrowed to invest in, for example, public transport, our universities, our science base or research and development, that would have been borrowing well spent and we would reap the rewards in terms of greater income. That issue must be addressed by a future Government, but there is a reluctance on both sides of the political divide to examine it.

I am being pressurised to wind up, so I shall draw my speech to a conclusion. All hon. Members recognise the importance of science to the well-being of this country's economy, but money has been wasted on the efficiency scrutiny. In their reply, the Government said that that was less than 1 per cent. of the budget, but that is £6.9 million which could have been used to reinstate the 1 per cent. cut in the science budget that has occurred this year. It could have reinstated the Faraday Partnership or contributed towards the foresight action programme for which aerospace companies are calling—they want funding from the Department of Trade and Industry to match the money that they are prepared to put in. We could have used the money to much better effect and used it for wealth-creating activities, rather than on the long period of disruption resulting from the scrutiny.

10.23 am

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I shall speak briefly so that other colleagues will be able to contribute.

I add my tribute to the valedictory comments about our Chairman, the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), who is to retire at the general election, and about my other colleagues who have given excellent service on the Committee. I also wish to mention by name Ms Eve Samson, our Clerk, who is always modest about what she does, but who has been able to co-ordinate all her staff and all our advisers. Our Committee takes notice of what advisers say, and Select Committee reports are much better for having taken good advice, instead of trying to grandstand politically.

It is interesting to note that colleagues on both sides of the House have been talking about privatisation or non-privatisation issues. I am an unreconstructed Thatcherite, and the Labour party—or at least its Front Benchers—seems to be trying to catch up with us. The history of almost all the institutions, universities and other learned bodies in this country shows that they are not purely public sector bodies. Most of them started in the private sector and all of them have a great deal of private sector involvement in their work, so to take the argument about privatisation to its extreme would be a waste of time.

In their response, the Government did not accept the Committee's criticism that the prior options review was conducted unsatisfactorily, but that is not specifically what we said. I want to make it clear that we were saying that prior options was yet another review, on top of half a dozen resulting from almost every organisation review. The point that I would like to make to Ministers and to anyone else who may be examining our science base is that we cannot continue to carry out review after review if we want staff to get on and do their job. That is the strongest criticism that the Committee tried to make.

It is not as though we have not already had reviews—the Committee would never say that it does not believe that we should always check whether we are getting value for money from our science base. It is the fundamental reviews of who will own the research institutes, how they will be organised and whether the structure will differ that are disruptive and destroy morale.

In my constituency, I have one of the bases of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and one of the fish laboratories. I also have two organisations that have been reviewed and changed: AEA Technology, which is now fully in the private sector, and the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, which has undergone great changes, not least in location. Once both organisations had their establishment nailed down and understood where they were going, they went from strength to strength.

We should therefore be careful about continual reviews. We must instead set up a structure that tells people that, every year, they should review how they have done and make minor alterations to their organisation if necessary. We cannot say that we are going to check whether organisations are in the public or private sector, or tell them that they are going to be completely changed around, because that would destroy their work.

On the issue of blue sky research and who should pay for it, I sometimes annoy colleagues on the Committee who say, "This is something that should be done by the public sector." I tend to respond, "You cannot say that in absolute terms." The private sector has often worked wonders in making progress in blue sky research, and we should always be considering how to involve commerce and industry in our science base. Any scientist who says, "I shall never talk to the other side, because I am publicly funded and only do things that will add to the sum of human knowledge," is not gaining the benefits of the approach taken in the foresight programme, whereby people consider where blue sky research might lead, and what might emerge from it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) said—and it bears repeating—that the United Kingdom has 1 per cent. of the world's population, 6 per cent. of the science spend and 8 per cent. of science discoveries. I believe that the more scientists involve themselves with industry and commerce and with the rest of academia, the better it is for the science base.

This is an important issue. I know that the Minister and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), are both supportive of science, and, as a result, we can work together to the greater benefit of the British science base.

10.29 am

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I join in the remarks directed at our Chairman, the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw). When he reads them in a few years' time he might think that they sound a little like an obituary, but we shall be sad not to see him in the Chair at future sittings of the Committee, because he has made a tremendous contribution. He has held the Committee together in good humour, which is a credit to him.

I shall respond to some remarks of the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson). I believe that there has been considerable science in our activities. Our Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council inquiry is a good example: not everyone can say that they attended a physics lesson addressed by Sir Martin Rees. I feel humbled by that experience.

Some of our earlier reports have put science centre stage—especially our report on human genetics, which will become important in years to come. It is a great pity that the only remaining area of substantial disagreement between the Committee and the Government and the outside world is the issue of insurance. We shall return to that fundamental issue, which will be important to a future Government.

[Mr. Andrew Miller]

Let me illustrate my criticism of what has happened by considering the constituency of the hon. Member for Norwich, North and the Central Science Laboratory. It cannot be a coincidence that there is a correlation between the location of such public sector science laboratories and marginal parliamentary seats throughout the country.

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Miller: The Minister holds up his hands in horror at that suggestion. It is an extraordinary coincidence. Of course, having a scientific background, I draw no immediate conclusions from that, but other aspects suggest a lack of scientific objectivity in the process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) commented on pensions. Since the privatisation of Amersham International, a new tactic has been adopted in handling pension funds. In the House of Lords' report of 1993-94, "Priorities for the Science Base", there is a strong recommendation in paragraph 5.10:

"The new Director General of Research Councils must be given real authority . . . which might include an unfettered right to publish his advice to the Minister".

As that is not really happening, one wonders whether there is scientific objectivity in the whole process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) spoke of the role of the Deputy Prime Minister. It is a great sadness that we do not have a Minister of senior Cabinet rank to fly the flag for science and technology.

From time to time, we see in the House the results of public sector science being abused in many ways. The classic example has been the handling of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis. It is a great pity that the Government have been unable to take a co-ordinated scientific lead based on a proper structure in a matter as important as that crisis, which has had an impact on every constituency. That would have been possible if a senior Minister had been in post. There remains a strong case for a member of the Cabinet taking responsibility for science. I do not decry the Minister, because he has worked hard in his role, but as a country we do not take the matter seriously enough.

The entire process that we have just gone through suffered from an element of predetermined intentions on the Government's part. It might have been a much better process if it had been carried out frankly and openly.

10.35 am

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am grateful to my hon. Friends for allowing me time to speak. I associate myself entirely with the remarks that have been made about the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), and the brevity of my remarks in no way reflects a lack of esteem—I am simply short of time.

The Government response to our report states that the recent exercise has been good value for money. I do not think that any hon. Member believes that. We are told that the cost of carrying out the review was less than 1 per cent. of the total science budget. I do not think that anyone believes that figure.

I have a letter written to me by the director of one of the research institutes that have been involved in the survey. It is headed "Confidential," so I do not intend to divulge his name, but he says that he finds it

"unbelievable that a Government driven so strongly by its perception of Private Sector excellence should ignore two important private sector financial considerations—the cost of time and the cost of lost output."

He continues:

"I could write for ever about this and especially the nonsense figure cited as the financial cost of the exercise (I know what figure the BBSRC submitted and know that it took no account of Institute costs)"—

so the costs that have been cited are simply the costs of the review teams. The cost to the institutes and the time that senior people in the institutes spent conducting the reviews is time lost to science.

The real problem is that the Deputy Prime Minister clings to an outmoded notion that the private sector is always superior to the public sector, which is completely contrary to common sense. We have had review after review under the Government. Following the White Paper in 1992, there was a management review. Following the management review, a multi-departmental review was conducted. Following that, an efficiency scrutiny was conducted by the Prime Minister's adviser, Sir Peter Levene, and now we have had a prior options review—time-wasting indulgence indeed, and all to no avail, because there has been minimal disturbance to the institutes, apart from the complete waste of time in conducting the reviews.

The secrecy with which the reviews has been conducted is very regrettable, especially in this case. On 29 January 1997, when the results of the prior options review were announced, the Department of Trade and Industry issued a press release accompanying the Minister's answer to a question asked by the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). One sentence of that press release read:

"I shall expect the NERC, under the oversight of the Director General of Research Councils, to pursue the opportunities for rationalisation and restructuring identified by the reviews."

How can it do so if the reviews are not to be published? Many people in the research councils are wondering about that. I have a letter from one of them, who suggests that the reasoning is that the reviews constitute advice to Ministers, and that such advice is not to be published. That is absurd. How can research councils implement advice if it is not published?

The fate of the royal Greenwich observatories is still in the balance. A review began at least two years ago to consider the rationalisation of the observatories in Edinburgh and Cambridge. Staff there are still waiting for a response. The problems are connected not with pensions, but with the complex ownership of the various sites around the world. The staff want the universities to take over the running of the observatories, as the universities use them. That is an eminently sensible suggestion. With a little common sense, the issue could have been resolved months ago, which would have been the best possible outcome.

10.40 am

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): I echo the warm sentiments expressed towards the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), and pay a special tribute to my

hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), who is also standing down at the next election. He has been of considerable help to me in my role as the Front-Bench Member with responsibility for science and technology.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Pudsey and other members of the Science and Technology Committee on obtaining the debate, and on their contributions to it. Once again, the Committee has provided a powerful service to the House. Without the Committee's efforts and output, the House would probably not have been given any time by the Government to discuss science and technology issues, let alone the future of the public sector research establishments. I fully recognise and endorse the views expressed by the Chairman of the Committee about the Committee's role and, like him, I hope that it will have a long-term future. His work, we hope, will go on into the next Parliament and beyond.

The last time the House discussed science and technology was on 11 June 1996, as a result of the Labour party allocating time to the subject. The Select Committee's first report was published in July last year, and the report that we are considering was published in November.

The Government announced their decision on the 38 establishments under review on 29 January. One day before this one and a half hour debate, they published their response to the Select Committee's report. I list that history of events to highlight the wholly unsatisfactory way in which the Government have gone about their business in relation to an important part of the nation's science and research base.

The all-party Select Committee made the same criticism of the Government's approach in the report of 17 July, which stated:

"We consider that the Department's policy on this matter is far from satisfactory".

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) seems to forget that criticism, but I draw it to his attention.

The real reason for the secrecy—or, as others have called it, the lack of transparency—in the conduct of the exercise, and the delay in publishing the findings of the review, was that the Government were working to only one agenda: the privatisation of the Government research establishments and the research council institutes. Their every effort was targeted towards that objective.

Anyone who doubts that need only look at the oral evidence that Sir Peter Levene gave to the Select Committee on 13 November last year. He said:

"When Ministers considered the report on the first tranche of reviews in May they decided that they needed some further advice on certain practical issues in relation to the privatisation option which they were considering."

Sir Peter went further. The Chairman of the Committee asked him:

"Could you confirm that you have not been asked, in relation to the Prior Options Review, to consider the effects of any changes on the science base itself?"

Sir Peter replied:

"That is not something we are looking at, that is correct."

Sir Peter was telling the Committee what the entire scientific community suspected—that the review was an off-loading exercise and a means by which to cut further the public science base. It was concerned not with quality, but with dogma. It took the Government from May until January—nine months—to realise that they had got it wrong all along.

The Government were clearly frightened to allow full parliamentary scrutiny, through debate, of their antipathy towards the public sector research establishments. They knew that to allow proper examination of Sir Peter Levene's review would bring into the public domain the almost universal criticism levelled against the Government in the matter. The Confederation of British Industry, important trade bodies such as the Food and Drink Federation, the Royal Society, the royal academies and the learned institutes all voiced their trenchant criticism of the Government's approach.

The Institute of Biology said:

"Whenever the Government does not get the right result it wants from a review, it sets up a further one with the apparent intention of privatising and cutting back on services."

The Royal Society stated:

"the programme is being driven by a generic belief in the merits of privatisation, without adequate regard to the strategic role of publicly funded research in promoting the national good."

I could go on listing criticism after criticism of the Government's approach to the reviews. All are documented in the minutes of evidence submitted to the Select Committee. They make salutary reading for anyone involved in policy framing and policy making.

The history of the review process makes sorry reading for the Government. In June 1995 *The Guardian* carried a detailed story showing that the Government were split from top to bottom on the issue, and they probably still are. The story was based on letters leaked to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). I shall read an extract from the article:

"The Government's response to a scrutiny of publicly funded research by Sir Peter Levene, the Prime Minister's efficiency adviser, was to be released last week alongside the report, *Forward Look: Future Priorities for Government Research*, and a Department of Trade and Industry report on industrial competitiveness."

But the letters show that a dispute between William Waldegrave, the Agriculture Minister, Michael Portillo, the Employment Secretary, Michael Heseltine, Trade and Industry Secretary, and David Hunt, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, has stopped the exercise.

A leaked letter from John Horam, the junior science minister, to James Paice, the junior employment minister, says that David Hunt wants yet another review of research councils and laboratories before final decisions are taken next year."

The article continues:

"Mr Portillo and Mr Heseltine, who favour quick decisions and privatisation of establishments—including the Health and Safety Laboratory—are objecting to further delays.

Mr Heseltine signalled his dissent by announcing that the National Engineering Laboratory, AEA Technology. . . and the Laboratory of the Government Chemist were to be sold without further reviews.

Mr Waldegrave, who set up the original review, has backed Mr Hunt, saying he would prefer a minimum review concentrating on laboratories, which had not been examined before."

There we have it. Those who are now without real influence in the Government favoured a more long-term approach, and those who would be king after the election—the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo)—favoured a full-scale privatisation of the laboratories and institutes. It is therefore right for us to warn the thousands of scientists

[Mr. Adam Ingram]

who work in those establishments to beware of a Tory fifth term. The Government have merely deferred their decisions on privatisation, not abandoned them. Anyone in doubt about that should read the speech given yesterday by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the right-wing Centre for Policy Studies. He said:

"The long march of privatisation goes on."

In their drive for ideological purity, the Government spared no expense in relation to the prior options review. As the Minister knows, I tabled a series of questions seeking to elicit the total cost of the exercise. The answers—95 in all, from the various Government Departments—varied from the helpful to the obscure. One thing was clear, however. Including the cost of the review of the royal observatories, more than £4 million was raided from the already hard-pressed science budget to pay for it. As other hon. Members have commented, that figure is probably at the lower end of the true cost incurred.

When I put questions to the President of the Board of Trade on the reviews of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council institutes, I was informed that it was not possible to quantify the costs incurred by the several Government Departments involved in the prior options procedures without incurring disproportionate cost.

That answer was given to me by the Minister for Science and Technology. He was telling me and the House that his Department was working in the dark about the real cost of the exercise that he had initiated. It makes a mockery of the Minister's claim that the entire exercise was about enhancing the nation's science base. That could not be the case, because he did not know the cost-benefit analysis to which he was working, he was unaware of the costs involved, and providing benefit to the science base was not part of the exercise. Sir Peter Levene admitted as much to the Science and Technology Committee.

We have come to the end of the single-track road on which the Government have been travelling for the past few years in their obsession to privatise the Government research establishments and institutes. It has been costly, wasteful in time for all concerned, and demoralising for the people who work in those establishments.

The many thousands of scientists who work in laboratories have faced an uncertain future for far too long. The Government will now claim that what they announced on 29 January is effectively the last word on this subject. Those who understand how the Government work will not believe them. They will know that powerful Ministers, such as the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence, have only one objective in mind: the wholesale sell-off of public sector research establishments.

The Government's announcement on 29 January was no more or less than blatant political expediency. A fifth term of Tory Government will bring the privateers back to the laboratory doors, and the whole exercise will be re-initiated.

The Labour party has made it clear—I re-emphasise the commitment—that a Labour Government will fully recognise the importance of Government research establishments and research institutes as part of the nation's essential publicly funded science base. The PSREs are a major national resource and a source of crucial research expertise involved in long-term research activity in collaboration with universities and industry. They have a vital role to play in offering independent, impartial advice to Government.

In these days of BSE, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, salmonella and E. coli 0157, the PSREs can contribute to the public good in a way that is not wholly open to the private research sector in its own right. Industry recognises that, as do the royal societies, academies and learned institutes.

In its response to the report by the Science and Technology Committee, which we are considering today, the Royal Society of Chemistry states:

"The Royal Society of Chemistry recognises the importance of safeguarding open public access to the information of PSREs as a key point of principle in the public interest.

The integrity and accessibility of the vast reserves of 'core data' within the existing PSREs should be preserved".

A Labour Government will provide such an environment, for the betterment of our nation's science base and the public good.

10.51 am

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): To an extent, this has been a bit of a wake, and I am sorry about that. This may be the last science debate in this Parliament, but it is certainly the last appearance in this Parliament in a science debate by my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), and the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), all of whom have contributed enormously over the years to the understanding of and enthusiasm for science, engineering and technology in this place.

I add my voice to the tributes that have already been paid to the very existence of the Select Committee. I hope that the valuable work that it has done in this Parliament—I note carefully the report on human genetics, for example—will continue in the next Parliament, if Parliament decides, as I hope it will, that a Science and Technology Select Committee should continue.

I have only a few minutes to respond to some of the serious points raised in the debate. I do not share the worry of my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey that the reviews were hasty and perhaps ill targeted. They were part of a continuing process. Naturally, they had to apply to the research council institutes, which account for about £220 million out of the £690 million expenditure. Some of the research councils have clearly indicated the benefit that has come from their work. The National Environment Research Council has made a clear statement to that effect, and I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that, quite often, such reviews make it easier to understand the relationship between a research council or institute, and the definition of the mission statement.

Several hon. Members, not only my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey but my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North and the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) and for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), talked about openness. As a Minister, I have always been available for questioning across the Floor of the House. I wish that I were questioned more, because I enjoy being at the

Dispatch Box and answering questions. There is no lack of desire on my part to be open. Obviously, I cannot table questions; I can only appear if the questions are tabled, so perhaps colleagues will think about how they could table a few more to me.

We have tried to make consultations as wide as possible. Naturally, the review groups were very much associated with the sponsoring Department. The explanatory memorandums have been, or will be, placed in the Library. Indeed, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food placed one there today about its decisions of 9 December. Those are part of a general attempt to ensure that we understand why a particular process has taken place.

I shall not comment on ministerial advice, because, as the House well understands, that matter has wider implications. One point that I do pick up, however, is that in no sense was I anxious to undermine the morale of those who work within the science base. I recognise the importance of the work done in the research establishments and the excellence of the scientific achievements. In some cases, when objectively reviewed, some institutes have shown themselves to be up with the best of any in the United Kingdom. For example, the figures at the Babraham Institute are extremely convincing. Several of the reviews made it clear that research is best carried out in the public sector. I welcome that outcome, so there is no pre-ordained message.

I was saddened by the speech of the hon. Member for East Kilbride, who, having found that the reviews came up with decisions with which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) decided that she was happy, had to find a different excuse for the fact that the outcome was not so distasteful, and decided that it had something to do with split Governments, frit Governments and electioneering. It was not the most impressive contribution to the debate, although I pay full tribute to the interest of—I nearly said my hon. Friend; perhaps I will—my hon. Friend in the science base. Unfortunately, it did not extend to his speech today.

Other matters of great importance have been raised. I listened closely to the comments by the hon. Member for Motherwell, South on risk assessment. I have made two speeches: one to the British Association for the Advancement of Science; another to the parliamentary Science and Technology Committee, on risk assessment in its broadest sense. I share many of the hon. Gentleman's concerns. It is almost impossible for a Minister to come to the Dispatch Box with a degree of certainty about what often confuses scientists.

It is also difficult for a Minister—I hope that I shall criticise none of my colleagues—to come to the Dispatch Box and say, "I shall do what the scientists tell me," because scientists may say different things, or their comments may have different orders of magnitude. In those circumstances, we need a wide and public debate, attempting to get the public to understand the degree of risk involved. That is why I proposed a sort of Richter scale of risk, so that there is at least an objective benchmark when we hit crises such as BSE, E. coli and longer-term matters such as the debate on climate control.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South made one comment which justified the reviews, although that was not why he made it. He said that, in many cases, the questions will change over time. I accept that, but the process of how one discovers the answers may have to change over time. A particular establishment may therefore need to adapt its mission statement or look again at how it is configured.

The Office of Science and Technology's role in Government has now been well established by its success within the DTI, with enormous improvements in the lines of communication and delivery mechanisms. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North mentioned, quite rightly, the work of the Central Science Laboratory at Norwich. He also mentioned the John Innes Centre and the Institute of Food Research. He has been a tireless champion for research at Norwich. I confirm that I hope that open discussions will continue with the university of East Anglia on how to create a centre of research excellence, particularly in food. I underline and confirm his comments, particularly about the strength of the science base. We should make much more of it.

The hon. Member for Selly Oak said that the prior options reviews cost £6.9 million, which is way out. Even the hon. Member for East Kilbride mentioned £4.3 million. The direct cost of prior options reviews is some £1.5 million. Obviously, other factors have been taken into account—for example, with ADAS and moneys connected with the conversion to next steps agencies, which are not directly relevant to the process. Whatever the figures—I stick to £1.5 million—they are tiny in relation to the overall quest for efficiency out of a spend of £690 million. No Science Minister can ignore that fact.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) said that there are too many reviews. I draw his attention to my announcement, and that of the President of the Board of Trade as the Cabinet Minister responsible for science, that we shall now revert to quinquennial reviews, although we will look very carefully at the management tasks that have been given to the various research institutes. They have been informed that they can put them in place.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston talked about how the House responds to some of these crises, and mentioned predetermination. There was no predetermination, and that brings me to the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram). Government have a duty to look at the health of the science base. This country has a science base of which it can be proud. Science base expenditure has risen by more than 15 per cent. in the past 10 years. That is a great achievement. British science is well recognised throughout the world as being excellent. We punch above our weight, partly because of the concern of the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We must now move on to the next debate and to the Chairman of the Public Service Committee.

Ministerial Accountability and Responsibility

[*Relevant documents: Second report from the Public Service Committee of Session 1995–96, on Ministerial Accountability and Responsibility (HC 313), the Government's response thereto (HC 67 of Session 1996–97) and first report from the Public Service Committee of Session 1996–97, on Ministerial Accountability and Responsibility (HC 234).*]

11 am

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): As you rightly say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I speak this morning in my capacity as Chairman of the Public Service Select Committee. As a Back Bencher, I remain convinced, as I was on 26 February 1996, when the House debated the Scott report, that Ministers should have resigned over that committee's findings.

When Sir Richard Scott came before the Select Committee, he was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright):

"Was Parliament denied information that Parliament constitutionally ought to have been provided with?"

Sir Richard replied:

"I think so, yes."

When asked:

"Did something constitutionally improper happen?"

Sir Richard said:

"Yes, I think it did and I said so."

In the event, the Government won the Scott debate by one vote and Ministers survived. I was always clear in my mind that our role in the Public Service Select Committee should not be to re-run the resignation debate; rather, it was to try to learn lessons from the Scott report and also from the Lewis affair, which had prompted our original investigations—lessons for ministerial responsibility and accountability and how it was to be defined and exercised in the modern world of a powerful Executive, the reformed civil service with new next steps agencies and, of course, rapidly changing events both at home and abroad.

We published our main report on ministerial accountability and responsibility last July. I thank my colleagues, many of whom are here today, our specialist advisers, our Clerk and our staff for their very valuable contribution. I know that hon. Members who are on the Select Committee and others wish to speak in the debate, so I shall summarise the main recommendations of the report.

With respect to definition, the Committee rejected the distinction that Sir Robin Butler attempted to draw when he came before the Scott inquiry between accountability and responsibility—in other words, that Ministers are always accountable to Parliament for the work of their Department but are not necessarily responsible for everything that happens in those Departments. We point out that it is not possible to distinguish clearly an area in which a Minister is personally responsible, and liable to take blame, from one in which he or she is merely constitutionally accountable. That is why we concluded:

"Ministerial responsibility is not composed of two elements with a clear break between the two. Ministers have an obligation to Parliament which consists in ensuring that government explains its actions. Ministers also have an obligation to respond to criticism made in Parliament in a way that seems likely to satisfy it—which may include, if necessary, resignation."

However, as a Committee we are not obsessed, except in one respect to which I shall return, with the question of resignation. In fact, we tended to agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) that Parliament undervalues accountability, and that proper and vigorous scrutiny in accountability may be more important to Parliament's ability to correct error than forcing resignations.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I hope not to use the time of the House again in this important debate.

My hon. Friend made the important distinction between accountability and responsibility, but does he agree that it is the responsibility of Ministers to order the arrangements in their Departments in such a way that correspondence—including that from statutory bodies—on certain matters is drawn to their attention, when necessary? If that does not happen, Ministers are irresponsible in the organisation of their Department. There may be cases where correspondence on important matters sent to the Minister is not received by the Minister personally.

Mr. Radice: My hon. Friend gives an important example that shows why it is so difficult to make the distinction that Sir Robin Butler was trying to make, and emphasises the point that Ministers are responsible for the organisation of their Departments. If the organisation does not work effectively, and prevents a Minister from knowing about things that he should have known about, the Minister is responsible for that.

When we considered the issue of accountability, it seemed extraordinary to us that the only explicit statement on how Ministers are expected to discharge their obligation to Parliament appears in "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", which is not only, as Professor Hennessy told us, in his usual witty way,

"a mix of immutable principles with housekeeping practicalities",

but very much a prime ministerial or Executive document. I congratulate the Prime Minister on publishing that document, but that is not good enough. If Parliament is to make Ministers more accountable, we need a parliamentary resolution that sets out in clear and simple terms what we ourselves expect of Ministers.

Our report attempts to provide such a resolution. Indeed, if our report has a big idea, it lies in our resolution on ministerial accountability. As the House knows, the Government have accepted the value of our idea and issued their own draft, which they have been discussing with the other main parties in the House. Meanwhile, the Public Service Select Committee has considered the Government's draft. As we say in our follow-up report, which we managed to publish in time for the debate—I congratulate those who were responsible for that—we believe that the Government's draft resolution represents

"a useful and important step forward".

The resolution has four main principles. First, it sets out a Minister's duty to account to Parliament for policies, decisions and actions of Departments and agencies. Secondly, it lays on Ministers the duty of openness, limited only by statute and by the code of practice on access to Government information. That is something on

which we have insisted, and I congratulate the Government on accepting what we said on that point. Thirdly, the resolution lays on Ministers the duty to give accurate and truthful information to the House. Any inadvertent error should be corrected at the earliest opportunity. If Ministers knowingly mislead the House, we expect them to offer their resignation to the Prime Minister.

We had a slightly different formula. We said that Ministers should resign forthwith. We are prepared to accept the Government's formula, because it is the case that Ministers offer their resignation to the Prime Minister.

The fourth principle is the obligation on civil servants to be as open as possible with Select Committees, as set out in the civil service code. I congratulate the Government on accepting our formulation. It is important to draw in civil servants: we are not proposing that they should be directly accountable to Parliament, but it is their responsibility to be as open as possible in their dealings with Select Committees and with Members when, under ministerial direction, they reply to their letters and meet them.

I congratulate the Government on their response to the Committee's report. However, I emphasise the need for speed. It is essential that a resolution along the lines proposed by the Government should be passed before the dissolution of Parliament and the general election.

The Liberal Democrats feel very strongly that agencies should be directly accountable to Select Committees. In the Government's formulation, agencies are mentioned only in passing; they were not mentioned at all in ours, although in our report we made several recommendations. We said that, in practice, the House had already moved beyond the conventional position, and that agencies and agency chiefs were directly involved in giving information to Parliament with only formal involvement of Ministers. In my judgment, the House would not want to give up that formal involvement, because many hon. Members appreciate the fact that they can go to Ministers if they are not content with the answers they receive from agencies. We may move beyond that in time, but we are not in that position at the moment.

The Committee has said that the Osmotherly rules should be amended to indicate a presumption that Ministers will agree to requests by Select Committees for agency chief executives to give evidence. As yet, we have no example of agency chiefs who have not come before a Select Committee when it has called for them to appear. We have also said that agency chief executives should give evidence to Select Committees on matters delegated to them in framework documents, and that that should be put in the Osmotherly rules. They do precisely that in practice.

The Lewis issue concerned the possible confusion between the responsibility of Ministers and that of agency chief executives. The Committee said, first, that there should be far greater clarity of roles; the role of Ministers and that of agency chiefs should be clearly defined with respect to the responsibilities in framework documents.

Secondly, we said—a number of hon. Members were responsible for this point, including some who are present and who, I hope, will speak later—that we should consider whether politically sensitive agencies should be established on a statutory basis. It is true that the ability to question Ministers about what happens in those statutory agencies would be lost, but the agency chiefs could come before and be directly accountable to Select Committees, which is what Liberal Democrats believe should apply to all agencies. What we would lose on the swings, we would gain on the roundabouts. We want the Government to consider that possibility.

I understand, and to some extent sympathise with, the Liberal Democrats' position, but it would be a tragedy if we failed to get this resolution through. The report concludes:

"We recommend that the Government should continue to seek cross-party approval for its draft Resolution, but we believe that failure to obtain the support of all parties should not prevent the House agreeing to a Resolution before the dissolution of this Parliament."

I want to make two short points about how the House could enforce accountability. The Committee considered a number of models, such as the Nolan model, which proposes a commissioner. We saw a possible role for the parliamentary ombudsman, but we preferred the idea of the Table Office publishing a list of the questions that had been blocked, which could be considered by a Select Committee—perhaps the Public Service Committee—to see what lessons could be learnt and whether the rules on the provision of information were being correctly applied.

The Committee believes that the Select Committee system should be strengthened. We must ask ourselves whether we have kept up with the revolution in government. In her evidence, Kate Jenkins referred to the Government as

"a modern organisation dealing with a rather old-fashioned form of accountability."

Another witness talked about

"the embarrassment of informational riches".

We receive an awful lot of information, but are we making as much sense of it as we ought?

I am glad that the Liaison Committee is examining the role of Select Committees in its end-of-term report, and I hope that, at the beginning of the next Session, it will take a longer look at that. The Liaison Committee should consider whether we have enough staff, whether there should be a closer relationship with the National Audit Office—I know that there are problems about that—and whether we should build a more proactive and positive relationship with agencies. I am sure that there are other questions that should be considered.

The Public Service Select Committee, in its very short life, has proved itself. It has considered civil service matters, but it has also had to deal with the aftermath of the Scott report and with constitutional issues. I see its future developing partly along those lines, rather like the Swedish select committee that we saw.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way during his concluding sentences. In reviewing the various matters that the Committee considered last year, particularly the supervision and checking of the accountability of Ministers, would he refer to the wider ambit of the ombudsman in Sweden?

Mr. Radice: There is no doubt that the ombudsman plays a much greater role in Sweden, as indeed does the audit officer, who is an important figure, although that

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may not be his correct title. In Sweden, various bodies enforce non-parliamentary accountability and protect the individual. Clearly, we need to consider that as well.

In conclusion, I repeat that we must get a resolution on accountability through the House of Commons. We must show the public that proper lessons have been learnt from the Scott report, and that some good has come out of those events.

11.18 am

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): This is an important, if somewhat esoteric, debate for both the House of Commons and the public at large. I am sure that it is right for the Liaison Committee to use one of its scarce slots on Wednesday mornings to provide the House with the opportunity to debate the issues to which the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) referred.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the work of his Committee. He served a long and distinguished apprenticeship as Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I agree with him that the new Committee, which he chairs, is making an important contribution. I congratulate also the Minister responsible for public service—also an alumnus of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service—on the response that the Government have given to the various recommendations in the Committee's reports. I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Member for North Durham that the resolution that he proposes should be passed during the current Parliament. We should seek to resolve the matter now rather than waiting until the next Parliament, when not all of us will necessarily be here.

This is a difficult subject to "mug up". It has an enormous history, which I shall say something about before taking up one or two of the points made by the hon. Member for North Durham about the Liaison Committee, which I have the honour of chairing. The history to which I refer is largely lost in the mists of time, but the matter came to public attention way back in 1954, on 20 July, when statements were made by the then Home Secretary about the famous Crichel Down case.

The myth grew up that a Minister had resigned—as Ministers ought in such cases—because something had gone wrong in his Department. Although the Minister had known nothing about it, because not he but his officials had been involved, it was nevertheless right for him to resign. As Professor Griffiths and others have amply demonstrated, however, this was a myth: the Minister in fact resigned for an entirely different reason—the fact that he had been involved in a row in the Conservative party's 1922 Committee. When I first arrived in the House, the myth was pretty widespread—and, in some ways, a rather good myth, as it endorsed the idea that Ministers should resign regardless of whether they knew about things if they had a responsibility to know about them.

None the less, the myth was a myth. It was very much to the fore again in 1985-86, when the Treasury and Civil Service Committee decided to look into the question of ministerial accountability. Rather to the Committee's surprise, it had hardly become involved in the issue when the Westland affair developed, and we were inundated with a spate of Committee reports. The Treasury Committee's seventh report, published at the beginning of the affair in 1985-86, was followed by a Defence Committee report; there was then a report from the Liaison Committee—the only one, I believe, to deal with a specific subject—and another Treasury Committee report. During all that there were innumerable Government responses, none of them very satisfactory. Important distinctions were made, relating to both ministerial accountability and responsibility and the position of officials—the distinction between officials' conduct and their actions.

Much of the report to which the hon. Member for North Durham referred is concerned not only with ministerial accountability and responsibility but with the position of officials. I believe that, following what I can only describe as the negotiations that have taken place between the Public Service Committee and the Minister, we have reached something of a modus vivendi with regard to officials. One question has been largely resolved: if the conduct of an official is in question, the Government, as employer, are responsible for their employees and for ensuring that they too are accountable to the House, through the Minister. I am glad about that, because the issue is not easy. I believe that the distinction that has been made is now perfectly workable.

The Public Service Committee recently published a report, which was followed by a Government response and then a response to that from the Committee. While that was going on, the new Osmotherly rules were published, which was something of an advance in that the position was rationalised. Paragraph 18 of the Public Service Committee's first report deals with accountability in Select Committees, a subject that concerns me as Chairman of the Liaison Committee. It recommends that the Liaison Committee should

"inquire into a number of aspects of the work of Select Committees, including their relationship with the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee"—

a point on which the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) may wish to comment—and adds:

"Although the Liaison Committee may be unable to undertake a full-scale inquiry in the little time that remains before the dissolution, we welcome the steps it has taken to assemble information".

I do not wish to breach Select Committee confidentiality, but it is well known that normally—although not invariably—the Liaison Committee produces an end-of-Parliament report, and I hope that it will be able to do so on this occasion.

I am a little doubtful about the Public Service Committee's broad recommendation that we should look into the operation of the whole Select Committee system. It is true that there was an inquiry by the Procedure Committee back in 1990, but an appraisal of how clever we have been may lead to a feeling that we are judge and jury in our own cause, and such an investigation should probably be carried out by someone else. I hope, however, that we can take up the issues raised by the Public Service Committee, and that—although I must not prejudge what will happen—the individual reports that normally form an appendix to the Liaison Committee's report will provide a firmer basis for an examination of the way in which the Select Committee system can be improved. I hope that that will be done before the end of the current Parliament, and will provide a guide for the future development of the Select Committee in the next one.

There is always a problem of continuity, not least because we have no mechanism to ensure that Select Committees are established without the delays that we have seen in the last three Parliaments. As I shall not be able to perform such a role, I hope that a group of existing Chairmen, returning in the next Parliament, will press strongly for such a development. I also hope that a system can be devised to deal with each of the issues raised by the Public Service Committee—for instance, the question of the NAO and the accountability of agencies.

These are deep waters. It is difficult to discuss such issues on one's feet, rather than writing about them in a report. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Durham on the way in which he has spelt them out. I believe that, although more work remains to be done, we have made considerable progress on the question of officials' accountability and, to a greater extent, that of ministerial accountability.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response. I hope that, despite the divisions that may exist between, say, the Liberal party and other parties on the precise content of the resolution, it will be tabled before the House rises for the general election. We want to get it out of the way and firmly on the record, so that, whatever the result of the election, the House will have made real progress on an important matter.

Select Committees now play a fundamental role in the responsibility of Ministers to the House. As we all know, in party debates across the Floor of the House it is very difficult to pin down a Minister; at Question time the subject changes from moment to moment, and there are very few supplementary questions. That is not the same ball game as appearing before a Select Committee on an all-party basis, a process that can go on for two hours or more. It is important for us to get the whole of that side of it right, and I believe that the progress made in the succession of Select Committee reports and Government responses gives us hope that matters will be improved in the future.

11.28 am

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton–under–Lyne): It is a great privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir. T. Higgins). His tenure as Chairman of the Liaison Committee provides a model for his successors, and we look forward to his principles being copied throughout the next Parliament. I am concerned with the notions of ministerial accountability, and I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) has introduced this matter, because it needs to be settled, at least to some degree, before the end of this Parliament.

Accounting officers, usually the permanent secretaries, come before us in the Public Accounts Committee. Sometimes they provide notes of dissent to the PAC. We had a notable case in the Pergau dam affair. The permanent secretary put in his note of dissent—I believe that it is called a letter of direction now—saying that he disagreed with the expenditure of public money. A total of £234 million was spent on the basis of a two-day visit to Malaysia to see the dam site. That was clearly inadequate. It was discovered by the PAC only because the National Audit Office had investigated the matter. If it had not, it would not have been discovered.

When I gave evidence to the Nolan committee, I said that I had requested that all notes of dissent should come to the PAC. That was finally agreed only days before I gave evidence to the Nolan committee, so now I get those notes of dissent via the NAO and receiving them is of great importance. Quite a few have come to my attention.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham dealt with the relationship between the Department and agencies. That relationship varies widely. We have one extreme example. Sir Michael Partridge, the permanent secretary to the Department of Social Security, came before the PAC on a number of occasions to deal with the Benefits Agency, whose head was Michael Bichard, a person of great standing and great ability; yet Sir Michael Partridge dealt with all the questions—it was as though it had not become an executive agency.

The Committee was happy with Sir Michael doing that, because he obviously knew exactly what he was talking about. He had all the details at his finger tips. That is the normal position, although one would not expect it to be, so there are variations between the relationship between such executive agencies and the Department. I am not against a certain amount of flexibility, but perhaps it would be better, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham rightly points out, if some of this were set out.

There are serious gaps in accountability, particularly in non-departmental public bodies, and I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) for the way in which he has reacted, which follows on from the arguments that some of us have been putting forward. He spelled it out in much greater detail, which I welcome. Non-departmental public bodies, or quangos as they are generally called, now spend about £17 billion of public funds each year. The Comptroller and Auditor General audits only half of the 300 quangos which fall into that category. The rest are audited by private firms appointed by Secretaries of State and include bodies with substantial sums of money, such as the Housing Corporation and the Legal Aid Board, which each spend more than £1 billion a year.

Where the CAG audits such bodies, there is obviously open accountability because reports are produced, which come before the PAC. The CAG reports to Parliament. We know that his independence is guaranteed. By contrast, private firms are appointed by Departments and report primarily to them. It is a matter for the Department whether the audit covers matters that are of particular interest to Parliament and the PAC, such as propriety in particular and the proper conduct of public business, which has concerned the PAC for a long time.

I and the right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), the Chairman of Public Accounts Commission, recommended that the CAG should audit such bodies and we produced a memorandum to that effect. Up to now, the Government have not agreed to that recommendation. We need to have the general principle accepted that important national public bodies should be audited by the CAG. That could be done by his appointment to all new quangos, as well as to existing ones, whenever their statutes come up for renewal. We therefore hope that there can be a move in that direction, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland has suggested.

As for other bodies, accountability systems of housing associations, grant-maintained schools as well as training and enterprise councils have developed piecemeal without proper scrutiny of public funds and something needs to

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be done to ensure that there is proper accountability there in the way that we wish. Lord Nolan saw great merit in the CAG being granted inspection rights over all public expenditure. As I have said, in a memorandum to the Government, the right hon. Member for Horsham and I recommended that that could best be provided by attaching conditions to any public funding.

Up to now, the Government have not agreed to that recommendation. They consider that the independent status of bodies such as housing associations is important. In the past, however, Parliament has recognised the need for the CAG to have access to independent bodies and legislation does provide for him to have access to grant-maintained schools, universities and institutions of further and higher education. The NAO's work in the education sector is supported by the Public Accounts Committee, but we need greater assurance that bodies within such sectors spend public funds entrusted to them efficiently and properly.

On contractors—people who undertake work for Government Departments and other bodies—we need to provide Parliament with an assurance that Government Department business in private hands has been conducted with probity and proper care of public money. The NAO needs to be able to scrutinise records held by private contractors. There is nothing revolutionary in that, because at present the European Court of Auditors has such rights of access. Where European money is involved, it can go to those contractors and see the records, but the NAO, acting on our behalf, does not have the same right. That is absurd, and the right hon. Member for Horsham and I put the memorandum to Government asking for the NAO to have that right.

I look forward to hearing the response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland, who I know agrees with many of my arguments. I hope that, following the next election, we shall see a move in this direction, to the benefit of accountability in government generally.

11.36 am

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) on his skilful and common-sense chairmanship of our Committee and on the concise and forward-looking way in which he introduced our reports in his speech. Like him, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon)—I am glad, as I am sure that the rest of the Committee is, to have such distinguished and experienced endorsement—I believe that it is important for the House to adopt the resolution speedily.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been brokering this with the political parties—I am glad that he has been doing that and doing it so well—but not because Ministers need to be told that they must tell the House the truth; they know that, and they take trouble to do so—a belief that reading Scott generally confirms rather than undermines. No the resolution is important because it makes it clear that in future the relationship is governed by parliamentary authority and not by Executive convention. That establishes an important principle on which Parliament will no doubt choose to build as occasions and necessity arise.

The resolution will also reinforce Scott in the sense of obliging Ministers and officials to consider with greater care the completeness and the impression left by the answers that they give. That is not easy, because the truth is many-faceted, and replies must be concise. When I was a Minister answering a parliamentary question about the number of escapes from Group 4 escorts, I gave the figures as accurately as possible and, of course, in the form requested. The Opposition gleefully found the answer satisfactory. Group 4, however, rightly felt ill used, because I had not said in the answer something that was also certainly true—that it had lost far fewer prisoners than the police and prison service escorts who had previously provided the service. Group 4 was not convinced that that direct and unadorned answer, which was fully accurate in response to the question, was other than very misleading. I think that Group 4 had a point, but the Opposition thought that the answer was fine.

I believe that the Government's version of the resolution is rather better than our Committee's original suggestion. The Government's version places a positive requirement on Ministers, whereas our's was negatively rooted in the old concept of contempt of Parliament. The effect is not very different, but the wording in the Government's version has enabled them, with some deftness, to emphasise that civil servants are accountable to Ministers—not to the House—by placing the duty squarely upon Ministers to ensure that civil servants give full and accurate information when the latter appear before the House.

I know that some hon. Members are unhappy that civil servants' accountability remains indirect and through their Ministers, but—like the hon. Member for North Durham—I believe that the resolution is a very real advance. I know that some hon. Members—not only those confined to the Liberal party—believe that civil servants should appear on their own account and answer questions autonomously, including their criticisms of and hopes for the current and future policies of their Departments.

I do not believe that that approach would be right or workable, or that it would enhance real accountability to the House, because officials are not responsible for determining policy, although they may and do heavily influence it. Such an approach would certainly destroy trust and working relationships, which are essential to the smooth running of a Department, and it would provide a club with which political opponents could beat Ministers over the head, without making them or their Departments one jot more accountable to Parliament.

I appreciate that the proponents of direct accountability of civil servants are thinking primarily of the role of agency chief executives—who often appear before Select Committees, and who have operational responsibility for running the agency formally delegated to them. It is argued that they are not traditional civil servants but have, it is said, an independent command and thus should be independently accountable to their Select Committee. However, I am sure that that is a misapprehension. An agency chief executive is supposed to direct daily operations, but according to the policy set by the Minister. Moreover, as the Minister is ultimately responsible, the Minister may intervene at any point. Indeed, as he is ultimately accountable, the Minister has a duty to intervene in operational matters if he thinks that some adjustment is required.

Therefore, I do not believe that the rules for agency heads can be different from those for other civil servants—although when they come before Select Committees they can shed light on a wider range of issues because they have a wider range of responsibility. Agency heads should answer fully and frankly when explaining what they are doing and what policies they are following. However, if they are asked questions which require them to discuss the merits of alternative policies that they might be asked to adopt, they should say that that is a matter for the Minister rather than for them.

I believe that part of the suspicion generated by the current arrangements results from hon. Members not always being quite sure of when a chief executive is speaking fully and frankly about the execution and objectives of a policy and when he is speaking guardedly on behalf of his Minister about policy alternatives. I am sure that it would be better if Select Committees were always understanding of that distinction, and if a chief executive were to say when discussion moves out of his direct sphere, so that the Committee could decide to raise those issues with the Minister himself.

I agree, however, with those who want change. I believe that it would be a great move forwards if the chief executives of some agencies had independent commands for which they could be held directly accountable by a Select Committee. The essential point, however, is that the nature of their responsibilities would have to change first. Moreover, the House could not then also hold the Minister accountable, as not even Parliament can have it both ways.

I therefore hope that the Government, the House and the appropriate Select Committees will give very careful thought to the case for cutting some agencies loose from their parent Departments. If that were done, policy requirements for agencies would have to be specified in statute or, more probably, in statutory instruments, so that policy would be public and belong to Parliament rather than to the sponsoring Minister. If a Minister wanted to change that policy, he would have to ask the House for changes to statutory instruments. A chief executive would of course have to operate within those statutory rules, but he—not the Secretary of State—would be fully accountable for all his decisions and how he ran the agency under that legislative prescription.

As this is a very short debate, I shall not attempt to argue the proposition fully. With the right agency, however, I believe that there could be real gains in morale, consistency and effectiveness and in liberation from the Department and from constant and unsettling changes of Ministers. There would certainly be greater scope, not less scope, for the House to oversee the agency. The Government would have to obtain Parliament's consent to any policy change, because Parliament would have to embody it in a new statutory instrument.

The chief executive would be directly accountable to the Select Committee. There would certainly be a reduction in the range of ministerial responsibility and of matters on which the House could effectively question Ministers, but there would certainly be no diminution of accountability to Parliament. Indeed, that accountability could be more thoroughly and effectively insisted upon and discharged.

I hope that we shall be able to return to this subject, as I believe it is an extremely important one in determining how we do our business.

11.46 am

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), the Chairman of the Public Service Select Committee, on the work that he is doing. I also hope that the Committee will be re-established, so that it can continue with and implement its thinking on the important matters covered by the valuable report that we are debating today.

Before I deal with the central point concerning my right hon. Friends and I in the Government's response—which the Government hope will eventually be a resolution of the House—to the Committee's report, I should like to endorse entirely the comments of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) on the importance of bringing non-departmental bodies, which are responsible for such substantial public expenditure, within the ambit of National Audit Office scrutiny. I hope that there is cross-party agreement on that matter, and that it will be acted on early in the lifetime of the next Parliament. The current situation seems to present an anomaly, which could easily be rectified, although not without certain consequences for the establishment of the NAO. However, as the case was so formidably put by the right hon. Gentleman, it is not necessary to enlarge on it.

I suppose that we should consider it flattering that the Public Service Committee felt it necessary, in paragraph 10 of the report just issued, to say that

"the Government should continue to seek cross-party approval for its draft Resolution,"—

I entirely agree with that—

"but we believe that failure to obtain the support of all parties should not prevent the House agreeing to a Resolution before the dissolution of this Parliament."

As several right hon. and hon. Members have said, there is a deficiency in the proposed resolution. The Committee is clearly not comfortable with the position on the accountability of chief executives of executive agencies. The second report repeats the comment of the first report that

"Chief Executives of Executive Agencies are in a rather different relationship with Select Committees than other civil servants are."

I am not sure that the Government accept even that point, but they ought to. The Committee said that the practice of the House in relation to agencies had already moved a good distance from the conventional relationship between Parliament and civil servants.

The right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) gave a caricature of the Liberal Democrat view on such matters. We are not suggesting that all civil servants should be required to give their personal views on matters of policy. That would be absurd and such an assertion does not greatly assist the debate. The right hon. Gentleman went on to say that our concerns are primarily about executive agencies. That is true. Executive agencies are a constitutional innovation that grew up without detailed legislative consideration of all the consequences. I am not even sure that they were thought to be a constitutional innovation. I do not think that they had special parliamentary treatment of the kind sometimes reserved for significant constitutional developments. The Government are responsible for that.

We do not find the development unwelcome. There is a great deal to be said for giving freedom of administrative authority to such bodies and an ability to respond without

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having to look constantly over their shoulders for ministerial guidance. However, that does not appear to be how the agencies have worked—or not all of them, certainly. The experience of the Prison Service agency, which the Committee considered, shows that the Home Secretary constantly interferes.

The distinction between policy and administration does not stand up, as the Committee recognises. I regret that the Committee has not followed through that recognition and recommended how to deal with the lacuna. I acknowledge that it has asked the Government to give further consideration to the matter. I hope that, if it is reconstituted, the Committee will consider how best to tackle the problem. It will not be tackled successfully by seeking to foresee the future and defining in ever greater detail events that may take place for which the bodies will have responsibility. Chief executives of agencies must be given greater responsibility for their own actions, and should have to give a direct account of those actions to Select Committees when they are called into question.

It is almost certainly futile to seek to draw a distinction between policy and administration. That trap was opened by Sir Robin Butler, with an entirely spurious distinction between responsibility and accountability. In linguistic terms, it is almost impossible to distinguish between the two. In constitutional terms, that distinction is a device to enable Ministers to have it both ways, putting themselves in a "heads I win, tails you lose" position. When Ministers do not want to take responsibility for an embarrassing issue, they treat it as an administrative matter, for which, by definition, the chairman of the relevant executive agency, or even a junior civil servant, is deemed responsible. In other circumstances, Ministers assume the right to intervene. That is wholly unsatisfactory.

The problem has existed for a long time, but it has become of much greater moment since the development of the next steps agencies. That development is valuable and I hope that we shall not allow this lacuna to remain. The Scott debate—not the debate in the House, but the debate that the investigation unleashed—opened up the possibility of Ministers taking refuge in the Butlerian distinction between accountability and responsibility.

The first operative paragraph of the proposed draft resolution says that Ministers have a duty to the House and its Committees to account, and to be held to account, for the policies, decisions and actions of their Departments and next steps agencies. That begs many questions. It takes refuge in the belief that there are sharp distinctions to be drawn. I do not believe that there are. It prevents the House from holding an executive agency's chairman to account and making a proper examination of his thinking in carrying out his tasks. The work of Select Committees will be hampered if this problem is not effectively and speedily tackled.

11.57 am

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): I shall be as brief as I can.

When in doubt, we tend to send for the judges. We have sent for two judges lately—Sir Richard Scott and Lord Nolan. Sir Richard Scott, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) said, told the Committee that Ministers had behaved in ways in which, constitutionally, they should not, and had denied information to the House which it should properly have.

The Government have proposed a resolution to deal with these matters. It says that when such things happen, there should be consequences. In the events that Sir Richard Scott investigated, there were no consequences. There never are in such events. In that case, the lack of consequences was simply more shameful and brazen than normal. Because time is short, we ought to tell the truth.

Lord Nolan arrived on the scene to dig the Government out of an embarrassing situation. He has done sterling work. In one of his recommendations, he invented a new doctrine that I shall christen prime ministerial responsibility, to be set alongside individual and collective responsibility. The doctrine was that the buck stops with the Prime Minister. He has to judge the conduct of those in his Government. It is interesting that that recommendation was explicitly rejected by the Government. Lord Nolan has recently expressed regret about that, welcoming the fact that the Select Committee has re-endorsed his recommendation.

Even more revealing is that, in wanting to dissent from the Committee's proposed resolution on accountability, the Government have said that they would prefer not to have direct accountability of Ministers to the House, but that it be mediated through the Prime Minister. Yet the Government have already rejected precisely the prime ministerial role, and the doctrine of prime ministerial responsibility. They have therefore nicely escaped from the accountability trap in which they were in danger of finding themselves.

In approaching these matters, the Government have set out to defend the status quo; they have said that the orthodox doctrine on accountability and responsibility is intact and that no change needs to be made. Civil servants, they say, should therefore remain responsible to Ministers and Ministers to the House of Commons. In fact, we in our honest mode know that neither of those things is true. We know that the civil servant-Minister relationship has been transformed by everything that has happened to the public service, of which agencies are simply the most conspicuous example, and that the accountability of Ministers to the House of Commons has been transformed by the rise of party discipline and everything associated with it.

We are therefore dealing with fictions. The question is whether the House of Commons wants to explode those fictions and start asserting a new kind of accountability in relation to a new kind of government. I see the importance of the Committee's proposed resolution—which I hope will quickly become a resolution of the House—as merely the beginning of a process of the House saying that it wants to start asserting itself a little more in relation to all questions of accountability. We have not been doing that.

I again call in aid Lord Nolan, who has been forced to reflect on these matters in some detail over the past couple of years. Giving the Radcliffe lectures at the University of Warwick just a couple of months ago, he said in relation to the Government's defence of the status quo—the orthodox doctrine:

> "We should not overlook the very centralist nature of this position. It brings the accountability of the Executive down to one very narrow point—the answerability of a hundred Ministers, or twenty Secretaries of State, to Parliament and its Committees. And given that Ministers must, by definition, command a majority in Parliament, the accountability which this provides is not necessarily very strong . . . Ministerial accountability is now in danger of being used to slow down the growth in accountability of public servants".

That is the central point. Government has changed. Can the House of Commons make accountability change with it? If it can, it will have risen to the occasion. If it cannot, it will have fallen below the occasion.

I suggest one further point: that the Nolan committee be converted into a standing constitutional commission, so that although we have a constitution that we pride ourselves on making up as we go along, at least with that new device, we would begin to make it up in a more consistent and coherent way.

12.2 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): In essence, the two different versions of the draft resolution on ministerial accountability that we have discussed reflect an historic tussle for authority between Parliament and the Executive. One makes the House the arbiter of the fate of a Minister who has knowingly misled; the other says that for such an offence the appropriate punishment shall ultimately be for the Prime Minister to determine. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster told the Committee:

"the language"—

of the draft resolution—

" . . . expresses what the House would expect but cannot enforce directly".

Surely there is an important point of constitutional principle and practice necessitating that Parliament's disapproval be the determinant of an errant Minister's fate.

The seeming immunity of the Executive from responsibility was highlighted by the recent statement of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who told the House that it had been "inadvertently misinformed" on organophosphates, which may be responsible for Gulf war syndrome, but that civil servants were to blame. The post-Scott scenario appears to be one where Ministers not only continue to deny responsibility, but brazenly on occasions blame civil servants into the bargain.

I was worried when the Committee heard that the Deputy Prime Minister and Sir Robin Butler both regarded it as entirely acceptable that Ministers used special advisers—civil servants—to recruit public servants, such as general practice fundholders, headmasters, and so on, as cheerleaders for Government policy. Surely it is unacceptable for any kind of civil or public servant to be used in the dissemination of party propaganda. It makes a mockery of the Government's argument that it would be "constitutionally improprietous" to put civil servants under a direct obligation to be fully co-operative with Parliament.

I fear that, post-Scott, neither the public nor the legislature can be confident that the Executive is properly accountable or responsible for its actions and the civil service is entirely the neutral executor of the democratic will.

12.5 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I do not think that there will be dancing in the streets of Bishop Auckland tonight because we will have had this debate. Nor do I think that it will be a decisive factor in the Wirral, South by-election. Nonetheless, it is very important, and I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) and the members of his Committee on bringing the report to the House. I also offer my thanks to the Chairman of the Liaison Committee, the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). He knows that I have enormous respect for him and the work that he has done in his capacity as Chairman. I endorse the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) about the right hon. Gentleman's work, and hope that his successor will continue along the same lines.

Colleagues will be relieved to know that I do not intend to go into a detailed exegesis of the doctrine of ministerial accountability. I fear that we would be here for many days if I did so. I want to give the Minister time to reply to the debate. Ministerial accountability is crucial because it goes right to the heart of our parliamentary democracy and impinges on the work of this House and the other House and how we conduct our affairs.

The Committee's resolution and the negotiations that followed it are a very important development. Given my experience in the House, I rather fear that, if Select Committee reports are radical, they are ignored, and if they are measured, they have some prospect of influence. The Public Service Committee's report is measured. I am sure that it does not go far enough for some members of the Committee and some people in the House, but it is measured and wise, and will be influential.

If, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) said, the report ends up as the beginning of a process by which Parliament over time will begin to assert its strength and use its powers to bring the Executive more fully to account, it will be a very important day. I urge the Minister, as other colleagues have, to bring the resolution to the House soon—certainly before Dissolution. It is quite right to say that the fact that we do not have unanimity in the all-party talks should not deter him and the business managers from making progress.

Ministerial accountability has, of course, become absolutely crucial, largely because of the Scott report and also because of the Derek Lewis affair. I remind the House that paragraph K8.1 of the Scott report said Ministers had failed to discharge their obligations to Parliament on seven separate occasions. The Scott report enumerates those occasions in paragraph D4.63:

"In the circumstances, the Government statements made in 1989 and 1990 about policy on defence exports to Iraq consistently failed, in my opinion, with the standard set by paragraph 27 of the Questions of Procedure for Ministers and, more important, failed to discharge the obligations imposed by the constitutional principle of Ministerial accountability."

I have always regarded that as a damning charge, and I still regard the way in which the Government dealt with the Scott report as one of the most cynical and ruthless attempts at self-preservation in post-war political history.

The Government did not achieve their aim. They thought that their authority was so fragile that it could not withstand ministerial resignations. The truth is that ministerial resignations would have enhanced, not diminished, the Government's authority and they stand condemned by that failure of judgment. The whole exercise was a prostitution of the legislature by the Executive, and that is why this debate is so important.

There is widespread mistrust of Parliament and all our institutions, and the next Government are determined to address that. Ministerial accountability must be examined.

[Mr. Derek Foster]

I am keen to enhance Parliament's powers to deal with the Executive and to strengthen Select Committees, which have been one of the most progressive developments during my time in the House. Indeed, I congratulate the Conservative Government on introducing them. They are far more efficient at scrutinising the Executive than are most of the debates in the Chamber.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton–under–Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) described some of the developments, and I am grateful for his endorsement for my modest proposals. He did not use the word "sleaze-buster" because he is too decorous, but that is what we need. A freedom of information Act would also increase the accountability of the Executive to Parliament.

I shall now turn to the resolution. I am delighted that the Public Service Committee put forward the resolution, and I congratulate the Chancellor on the way in which he conducted the all-party talks. I also thank him for his positive response to our requests. I hope he will not mind me saying that originally he did not want any mention of civil servants included in the resolution. I believe that he wished to exclude civil servants because he feared that he would be pushed into adopting the Liberal Democrat position that civil servants should be made directly accountable to the House. That is not my party's position. It would be a major constitutional change, and I am not convinced that it is necessary. However, I do not exclude the possibility that it might be a solution for the future.

The Chancellor also responded positively to a suggestion from the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), who is not in his place this morning, to reinstate the Committee's reference to ministerial resignation. The reference is not in the form that the Committee suggested, but the difference in the Chancellor's version is unimportant.

The resolution should be put before the House soon. The day that it is accepted will be an important one, because it will enhance Parliament's power to deal with the Executive. My party will support the resolution and I am sure that Parliament will wish to return to it on occasions, as our understanding of the issues develops and as new situations arise. Parliament will thus be able to build on the excellent work of the Committee.

I turn to the subject of accountability and responsibility. If Ministers are accountable to Parliament for all the actions and activities of their Departments and agencies, there is no accountability gap, but there is a responsibility gap. Ministers want to be responsible, perhaps reasonably, only for those matters in which they have been directly involved. However, Scott had an important message for us in his final paragraph:

> "If Ministers are to be excused blame and personal criticism on the basis of the absence of personal knowledge or involvement, the corollary ought to be an acceptance of the obligation to be forthcoming with information about the incident in question. Otherwise Parliament (and the public) will not be in a position to judge whether the absence of personal knowledge and involvement is fairly claimed or to judge on whom responsibility for what has occurred ought to be placed."

The Government try to pretend that the responsibility gap is not important or that it should be maintained to protect civil servants. The rest of the country believes that the gap is there to protect Ministers, not civil servants. Indeed, one former Minister has said that nobody resigns for anything these days. Ministers want to claim credit for everything that goes right in Departments and agencies and want to delegate blame for what goes wrong. That is at the heart of the responsibility gap. I share all the reservations of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), but I am not convinced that his solution is the right one. If the House debates the issue, we can all express our reservations, but we should make progress on this issue, which would be an important step for Parliament.

12.17 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): I join the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) in paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) for his chairmanship of the Liaison Committee. He was also an effective Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. This could be one of the last occasions on which we can pay tribute to him in the House and I add the Government's support to the right hon. Gentleman's comments.

I shall deal first with the substantive point made by the right hon. Member for Ashton–under–Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. He mentioned the importance of improving the accountability of non-departmental public bodies. I have published today, and copies are now available in the Vote Office, a White Paper called "The Governance of Public Bodies: A progress report". The document is inevitably detailed, and hon. Members will want some time to consider the Government's conclusions. The conclusions are important, and address some of the points made by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland.

I shall summarise the conclusions in the short time I have available, as I must also refer to the points made by the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice). First, the Government will review the position of every executive non-departmental public body with a view to extending the ombudsman's jurisdiction in this sector as widely as possible. Consideration will be given to bringing advisory bodies into the jurisdiction for the first time.

Secondly, we will introduce a model code for the staff of non-departmental public bodies, and fuller and clearer guidance on codes of practice for board members of public bodies, covering in particular rules on conflict of interest. I hope that these new codes of practice will be in place by 1 June, and I expect a start to be made at the beginning of the new financial year.

Thirdly, we have made a commitment to take forward the Nolan committee's recommendation on the greatest use of consultative arrangements, which bring together local public bodies and local authorities.

Fourthly, we propose to introduce a national consultative forum to bring together key interests in the public sector. This will be led by the National Audit Office, the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission and will deal with co-ordination.

Fifthly, details of thousands of appointments to executive NDPBs and to NHS bodies are now available on the Internet. I hope that the Commissioner for Public Appointments will be able to extend his role in this field

in due course, although it is asking too much for him to do so at the moment, as he is dealing with central Government.

Finally, I can deal with a point raised by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne. The Comptroller and Auditor General should have the power of inspection of all NDPBs which are not already audited. There is a broad consensus in the House on that, and I hope that the White Paper will receive appropriate consideration.

I hope that the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland will forgive me if I refer for a moment to his article in *The Guardian*—I cannot resist commenting on it. It was written in slightly less inflammatory language—as he and I know well—than that produced by our respective central offices or headquarters. For the convenience of the House, I wish to deal with one point in the article, entitled "It's a Sleaze Buster", in *The Guardian* on 30 January. I know that he would not wish to imply in any way that the civil service did not behave in other than a perfectly impeccable and objective fashion.

The point that I am trying to make is that it is not Ministers who award contracts, and it never has been—under Labour or Conservative Governments. After the appropriate advertising in the official journal and after the proper tendering process, the civil service provides advice on contracts and Ministers are invited to agree. Sometimes there are directions, and I have placed in the Government's response to the Select Committee report the few examples of directions that I could regularly find.

Principally, directions have been concerned over the years with Ministry of Defence procurement matters, where Ministers might decide for policy reasons to pursue a different route—more to do with the impact of defence procurement decisions on the industrial base—than that recommended for value-for-money reasons by civil servants. It is an objective procedure, and there is no sleaze in the letting of Government contracts. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland would not for a moment subscribe to that critique.

In terms of the privatisation of Government agencies, we have to follow a process which depends on the advice not only of civil servants, but of the consultants involved. We must do so because the NAO looks at all major privatisations—it is properly and routinely looking at the HMSO privatisation now. I hope that the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland will not mind me commenting briefly on that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) has long experience of these matters, and he cited with some anguish the problems that he had encountered in answering a parliamentary question. I know that Madam Speaker was concerned about the accuracy with which the Stationery Office was reporting Parliament. I have looked into this matter, because some hon. Members have raised it on points of order and debates with Madam Speaker.

I have come to the conclusion that the error rate has not changed in any significant fashion since privatisation. There are very, very few errors each year, and those which are made are divided equally between the printers and those who supply the text. I am full of admiration for the reporters of our procedures, and for HMSO—now the Stationery Office Ltd. I could trace a couple of errors by the printers since privatisation, but they were made by the same loyal staff who worked for HMSO. I hope that that will set Madam Speaker's mind at rest.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham, who talked about the present position in terms of the accountability of chief executives. I do not believe that chief executives can both be non-statutory civil servants and accountable directly to Parliament. My right hon. Friend—and, I suspect, the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)—would probably prefer some agencies to become statutory bodies, and I have taken part in debates with Mr. Lewis when he has argued that point. That would give chief executives a wholly different relationship with Parliament, and it is a case that could be argued.

I do not believe that we can ask chief executives, as civil servants, to accept direct accountability and responsibility to Parliament through Select Committees, because that would directly compromise the responsibility of Ministers to Parliament. I am grateful for the support of the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland on this. Ministers know no bounds on their accountability, although there are some limits to their personal responsibility.

That allows me to turn to the final and substantive point raised by the hon. Member for North Durham. I am grateful not only to him, but to the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland for their remarks about the Government and myself. As far as the motion is concerned, the Government agreed in principle in November that such a motion was appropriate. This is not a confession of culpability or of error, or that there is somehow a great gulf in the understanding by Ministers of their responsibilities to this House.

"Questions of Procedure for Ministers" lays out clearly the responsibilities of Ministers to be forthcoming, to tell the truth, not to deliberately mislead the House and so forth. The Government agreed that, in parallel with those instructions from the head of the Government to Ministers, there should be a motion in the House to clarify and set down for the first time—a historic constitutional moment for this House and for Parliament—the responsibilities of Ministers.

We accepted that, and I have discussed the text with the major Opposition parties. The draft of the current motion is in the Select Committee report, and is available in the Vote Office. We have had helpful comments from the Clerk of the Parliaments and the Clerk of the House of Commons, for which the Government are grateful, and these will allow some amendments to be made. I intend to discuss those amendments—which I believe to be procedural and technical in essence—with the major Opposition parties shortly. Discussions in the House of Lords are continuing.

I note that there is no agreement between all parties on the accountability of chief executives of agencies directly to Parliament. That issue has been raised this morning, and the Government have set out their position. We believe that it is important as a point of principle to make sure that chief executives assist Parliament.

Indeed, I can confirm to the hon. Member for North Durham that I cannot find a single instance of a chief executive of an agency not appearing before a Select Committee. It is their duty to help, to turn up, to be as forthcoming as possible and to operate within the Osmotherly rules—named after the civil servant who drew them up—which describe their responsibilities to Parliament. But at the end of the day, they appear with

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

the foreknowledge and agreement of their Minister, and the Minister himself is fully accountable. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging that civil servants cannot be expected to debate or answer for policy, as it is their job to help Select Committees.

Once this motion is passed, my advice is that it will remain through Sessions and Parliaments until the House wishes to return to it. Indeed, the House can return to a motion that we pass at any time, and amend it at any time.

I conclude by thanking all those who have contributed to this debate for their helpful comments, especially in relation to the motion. I confirm on behalf of Her Majesty's Government that it is our aim to bring that motion to the House before Dissolution. It is unfinished business, and the whole House will wish it to be finished.

Vale of Glamorgan (Inward Investment)

12.29 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): For nearly five years, I have had the privilege to represent one of the most beautiful constituencies in Wales, with Cosmeston lakes on the boundary with Cardiff, South and Penarth to the east, St. Donat's castle to the west, Barry Island and Porthkerry park in Barry, the attractive market towns of Cowbridge and Llantwit Major, and several miles of coastline. We also have countless lovely villages and some very pretty countryside.

Any visitor to the Vale can readily appreciate the tourist attraction that it represents and the general prosperity of the people. Closer inspection would reveal some of the sources of that prosperity and why unemployment in my constituency has fallen from 8.7 per cent. five years ago to 7 per cent. last month. If the *Daily Mirror* is to be believed, the figure is even better today.

There has been well over £1 billion of inward investment in the Vale in the past five years. I should like to give the House some examples of the successes achieved there, to draw attention to the likely causes and to express some hopes for the future. One of the most exciting developments in Wales is known as the Waterfront Barry, where Associated British Ports, in partnership with the Welsh Development Agency, is engaged in the regeneration of a 190-acre site.

The principal components of that £25 million project are 65 acres of residential development, comprising more than 1,000 homes for all sectors of the community, including luxury waterside apartments and affordable family homes with gardens; a 12.5-acre retail park with 120,000 sq ft of retail space, to revitalise the town centre and restore Barry's reputation as one of the major shopping centres in south Wales; eight acres of commercial development, with new offices, restaurants and smaller businesses; and about 40 acres of leisure and recreational development adjacent to the waterside, creating amenities, space, jobs and environmental improvement.

I had the pleasure of visiting that development last Friday and I had a bit of fun driving a digger on the site; I hope that I did not damage it. It was an interesting visit. The first phase of the contract for the Waterfront development, due to be completed on St. Valentine's day, is virtually complete. The former graving dock has been completely lined, filled with low-level waste and covered with earth that is being levelled in readiness for the construction phase.

The first tranche of new retail development and family homes should be ready in the first quarter of 1998. The project will create many new jobs, both during the 10-year construction period and in the finished development.

The port of Barry has also received a major boost, with the signing of a 25-year contract with Dow Corning. That is associated with the new £150 million Genesis plant, and from 1999 onwards it will substantially increase shipping traffic at the port. That is important to Barry and reflects ABP's continuing core activity as a company that runs ports.

I should also mention the Van Ommeren tank terminal in Barry, which took over the Powell Duffryn terminals last November. Van Ommeren is negotiating with Dow

Corning and ABP to build a new storage facility near the chemical complex by Hayes road in Barry. The first phase will allow the 24-hour transfer of feedstock and finished products between the production plant and storage facility by dedicated pipelines, and from the storage facility to two berths in No. 2 dock, Barry, to meet the worldwide sales and demands for silicones.

Cost estimates for the first phase are £11 million, and construction should commence at the end of this year or the beginning of next year, and last for about 18 months. Jobs will be involved during the construction period, and eventually the existing staff at the old tank terminal will transfer to the new tank facility. The main benefit of the development is the guarantee of existing jobs into the next century and the continuance of silicone production in Barry at the Dow Corning site.

Historically, British Petroleum was the major player on the chemical complex site near Hayes road, but over recent years much of the land has been transferred to other companies. Despite that, BP invested £26 million in 1992 to build a new phenolic resins plant, and in doing so created one of the most modern manufacturing facilities in Europe. BP employs 125 people in Barry and currently has 12 modern apprentices. Given the size of the work force, that number of apprentices represents a considerable investment in the future.

Dow Corning is one of the biggest investors in the Vale. The company, founded in the United States in 1943, began to manufacture silicones at Barry in 1952. Since then, it has invested more than £100 million in the site and developed thousands of new products. It is currently in the middle of a major expansion of capacity at Barry that will create about 150 new jobs, so Dow Corning will employ more than 600 people there.

The project will generate up to 500 additional jobs during the construction phase. Silicones are used every day, without people realising it. The work force at Dow Corning are indirectly helping to protect tiny diodes, to make babies' teats, to seal windows and even to make sure that stockings stay up. The people of the Vale can be proud of that forward-looking, high-investing company.

Another important investor in Barry, next door to Dow Corning, is Cabot Carbon, which built a plant for $62 million in 1991—note the dollars, as this is American investment in Wales—of which $6 million was grant. Since then, $1 million was spent on a dispersion plant in 1995 and a further $5 million on plant expansion last year. This year, a further $1 million is being spent on the treatment plant and $2.5 million on plant expansion. In addition, $1 million is spent each year on improvements. Cabot employs 67 people in Barry, plus 10 contractors, and expects to take on four extra staff this year.

On the same important site, Dow Chemical Co. employs 32 people and has six contractors permanently on site. The number of employees has diminished over the years, but two teenagers are working there under a work experience scheme organised by Barry training and enterprise council. Over the past five years, Dow has invested approximately £5 million in its facilities and it is planning a long-term future in Barry. It hopes to recruit one or two new employees in the coming year.

Zeon Chemicals is another Barry success story. Between 1988 and 1995, production increased by 50 per cent., but acrylonitrile and butadiene emissions were reduced by 90 per cent. Last year, substantial further investments were made to expand production while further reducing emission levels. Zeon and all the companies on the chemical complex in Barry co-operate closely with one another to protect the environment, to comply with statutory requirements and to keep the public informed through regular consultation.

The last company on the chemical site that I must mention is European Vinyls, a company that has its UK headquarters at Runcorn and is the largest PVC producer in Europe. It employs 100 people in Barry in a plant built by BP for £42 million in 1981. In the past three years, EVC has spent £4.5 million on improving the plant.

On the western edge of my constituency, Ford Bridgend produces the Zetec engines for the Escort and other Ford models and I understand that production is likely to continue, whatever happens at Halewood. Of particular interest to me, as a Jaguar fan, was seeing the production line for the new Jaguar V8 engine, which was gradually stepping up production in July last year, ready for the introduction of the fabulous new Jaguar sports car in the autumn. That certainly bodes well for the future of that plant, as I have no doubt that the demand for that model will help to protect the well-paid jobs at the Ford plant.

Moving to the northern boundary of my constituency, I must refer the House to the success of the Robert Bosch plant, which was opened in January 1991. Last year, when I visited the factory, it was producing 15,000 alternators a day and easily out-performing its rival parent plant in Stuttgart. In 1995, it produced its 10 millionth alternator. Bosch had 27 apprentices at the time of my visit and was using sophisticated methods, such as just-in-time working. There was high pay for the workers, giving the lie to the allegation so often made by Labour Members that Wales is a cheap-labour economy. The plant provides excellent working conditions and good retraining facilities. In case anyone from Cardiff international airport is listening, I should perhaps mention that Bosch would very much like a direct air link between Cardiff and Stuttgart.

I visited Robert Bosch in Stuttgart in 1995 and asked Mr. Gerhard Turner, who is now commercial director of the K2 division, why the company had come to Wales. He said that, first, it provided easy access to the large United Kingdom domestic market. Secondly, he mentioned the lack of red tape in Wales and the fact that it took half the time to build the plant and get it up and running there as it would have taken in Germany. The third reason was the flexible work force: if an order is received on Friday to supply goods the following Monday, the company does not have to engage in lengthy negotiations with work force representatives—they simply change the shifts and get on with it.

Fourthly, the company has no problems with moving goods by road at weekends in Wales: in Germany, there are restrictions on lorry movements at weekends. Fifthly, and a very important factor, there are the lower social costs that are added on to wages, which make a huge difference to the net cost of employing people in Wales compared with Stuttgart. Finally, there are good road and rail communications. Mr. Turner might also have mentioned that the Vale is an extremely attractive place for Bosch workers to live.

RAF St. Athan is the biggest employer in my constituency. It has been pursuing an active civilianisation programme for the past four years and 1,190 new jobs are being created over a three-year period. In the process,

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about 350 personnel are being trained. The annual cash budget for RAF St. Athan is around £115 million, or about £250 million for the full cost budget, with spares and overheads. About £50 million of that finds its way into the local economy. RAF St. Athan is subject to market tests and open competition and is due to submit its in-house bid on 19 February. Whatever the outcome, prospects look good.

Also, Blue Circle Aberthaw is investing nearly £2 million this year and is planning to invest another £5 million by the millennium.

Finally, there is Cardiff international airport, which in some ways is the jewel in the crown. The airport, which was run by three local authorities, was bought by TBI plc and has since gone from strength to strength. Two Ministers have recently visited RAF St. Athan and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has visited Cardiff international airport; they could see for themselves the huge strides that have been made since privatisation.

I have a special plea for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales on behalf of the airport. I ask him most sincerely to continue to plan to fund the new road to connect Cardiff docks with the airport. My hon. Friend has already approved some £800,000 of initial spending to cover the design stage of the road and I emphasise the tremendous importance of the road, not only to the potential £40 million development in the vicinity of the airport but to the whole of Barry, including the chemical complex that I described.

I also hope that we shall see the opening of the existing freight railway line between Barry and Rhoose for passengers, preferably with a spur serving the airport and, ideally, the line continuing to Llantwit Major. I appreciate that there are cost problems for that major investment in upgrading the line, but with the substantial housing development in Rhoose and Llantwit Major and the increasing traffic at the airport it may well become a viable proposition.

I must put in a special plea on behalf of residents in the Dinas Powys area of my constituency, who would appreciate some help from the Government. I realise that, as the highway authority, the Vale of Glamorgan council is responsible, but we very much want a new bypass around Dinas Powys; it would not only improve the quality of life for people living there but make transport between Cardiff, Barry and the rest of the Vale very much better.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) for giving us the opportunity to debate the economic and inward investment success story in Wales. It is a remarkable story, which many of our competitors envy, and it is a story that affects all of us in Wales. My hon. Friend details an impressive list of all that is going on in the Vale of Glamorgan. I know that that reflects his extensive activities as an assiduous constituency Member of Parliament. I believe that that is very much in the traditions of the late Sir Raymond Gower who, in many ways, was the predecessor of both my hon. Friend and myself.

My hon. Friend excited me with what is happening with the waterfront development in Barry. I am sure that his practical involvement recently will have been significant in taking that project forward to its imminent completion. He rightly referred to the importance of Cardiff International airport to his constituency. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was one of the Ministers who visited recently, and he went elsewhere in south Wales last week. I am sure that he was impressed by being able to see on the ground what good use we make of the money that we receive from the Treasury. That will better equip my Department for the next round of public expenditure negotiations.

My hon. Friend was concerned about improving the road from Cardiff to the airport. The road is the responsibility of the Vale of Glamorgan local authority as the highway authority. The original scheme involved on-line proposals to upgrade the A4050 and the A4226 between Culverhouse Cross and the airport at a cost of £23 million. However, there was fierce opposition to the plan, and there were congestion concerns, to the extent that an alternative, off-line route has been proposed at a cost of £58 million. My hon. Friend is a strong supporter of that proposal. As he said, we have provided transport grant settlement of £800,000 for the local authority for 1997-98, which will allow it to proceed with the preparation work for phase 1 and to investigate further the feasibility of phase 2.

I have to acknowledge my hon. Friend's persuasive powers. At a time of the greatest constraint on public expenditure, he was primarily responsible for persuading the Secretary of State and me to provide the £800,000 that will enable the local authority to go forward. No doubt next year he will seek to be even more persuasive in trying to elicit money from us, but I cannot anticipate. I note what he said about the need for the Dinas Powys bypass, but I cannot give any promises today.

My hon. Friend's constituency has shared in the exceptional success that we have enjoyed in attracting inward investment to Wales. Since 1983, almost 7,000 new jobs have been promised, with associated capital investment of almost £1.7 billion. Ford, Robert Bosch and British Airways have caught the eye because of their size and importance, but many other good projects have come to the Vale of Glamorgan through companies from the United States, Europe, the far east and elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

We have had a good run of industrial news for Wales in the past year or so. Sony, Ford, Newport Wafer-Fab, Toyota, British Aerospace and St. Merryn are only a few examples. LG was the most significant single announcement. It was the largest ever inward investment not just in Wales and the United Kingdom but in Europe. Those projects will take a further 10,000 people off the unemployment register. Moreover, that figure does not take account of the indirect jobs that will undoubtedly be generated.

What the Government have done to bring LG to the Cardiff-Newport area must be of the greatest importance to my hon. Friend, given the close proximity of his constituency. We shall build on those investments in the months and years to come and make sure that Wales continues to forge ahead in the important job of sustaining a vibrant and dynamic economy which is capable of taking on and beating the best in the world.

It is incumbent upon us all to ensure that the whole of Wales enjoys the full benefits of inward investment. We want better distribution throughout Wales and we have given the Welsh Development Agency targets to achieve that. I am pleased that those targets have been achieved and, indeed, consistently exceeded over the past three years.

Major announcements in recent months present enormous opportunities. All of us involved in economic development must work together to make sure that we take full advantage of those opportunities for the people of Wales.

Wales is home to more than 300 overseas-owned manufacturing companies which employ more than 75,000 people. They are spread throughout Wales from Toyota in the north-east to Panasonic in the south-east, Euro DPC in the north-west and Calsonic in the south-west. Those investments have provided much-needed new jobs but the impact of inward investment is wide-reaching. The new jobs are vitally important to the families they support: none of us should underestimate that.

Equally important is the diversity that inward investors have brought to Wales. Where we were once heavily dependent on a narrow band of industries, we can now boast significant strengths in automotive components and aerospace—as my hon. Friend knows through their strong representation in his constituency—in consumer and office electronics, and a growing one in semiconductors. We are at the leading edge of technology in many of those sectors and more and more centres of excellence are being established in Wales. That diversity has given the economy of Wales robustness and dynamism. Wales can now withstand the inevitable peaks and troughs of the commercial world.

Falling unemployment in Wales has not happened by accident but by design. As my hon. Friend said, there has been another big and welcome fall in unemployment today. In January, unemployment in Wales fell by 2,700, leaving a rate of 7.1 per cent. Since October, 9,200 people in Wales have been taken out of unemployment.

Our excellent performance might well be compared with that of, say, Germany, because now no constituency in Wales has unemployment as high as the latest German figure of 12.2 per cent. I have the latest figures from the Library, which show that not only does every constituency in Wales compare favourably with Germany but only one out of the 38 constituencies in Wales has unemployment higher than the European average. I am pleased that the Vale of Glamorgan is below the Welsh average, and that my own constituency is the second lowest in the Welsh list.

I readily agree that unemployment remains too high, but we should take encouragement and heart from the progress that we have made, especially compared with others in Europe. In line with that was the banner headline on the front page of the national daily newspaper of Wales, the *Western Mail*, which proclaimed the likelihood of a further 1,000 jobs coming to the capital city of Wales, through a proposal for a call centre by CableTel, which is already well represented in south Wales. That is in line with other companies that have chosen to invest in Wales to establish call centres.

That fact offers a stark rejection of a less prominent article on page 5 of the same newspaper describing a survey which suggested that people find the Welsh accent unattractive and that even we in Wales do not care for it. I am sure that the survey must be too narrow to have any real validity, as I am sure that CableTel and others who have already established call centres in Wales, or are thinking of it, would not have done so without the fullest research, including evaluation of the worth of the Welsh accent in dealings over the telephone. Again, the possibility of 1,000 jobs from CableTel is welcome. My hon. Friend and I welcome the fact that more employment will be created for his constituents in the Vale of Glamorgan and I hope to discuss the proposals with Mr. Terry Ryan of CableTel.

Strong economic and fiscal measures have given this country stable and predictable inflation and interest rates, which have given companies the confidence to invest in Wales. We are getting new investors, as well as expansions by well established companies.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Has my hon. Friend noticed the extraordinary outburst of Mr. Niall FitzGerald, the chairman of Unilever, claiming that, if we do not join a single currency, that enormous multinational company, which employs 21,000 people in Britain, would think twice about its investment programme in the United Kingdom? Is that not an outrageous interference in the political process, and does not the situation in Wales show that Mr. FitzGerald is quite wrong about inward investment? Companies such as Nissan and Honda, and many others, have said that their decisions have nothing to do with the single currency. Would it not be as well for Mr. FitzGerald to leave politics to the politicians?

Mr. Jones: I am sure that there is great substance in my hon. Friend's point. In considering matters such as the single currency, which go wider than this debate, we need to take all factors into account rather than adopting the narrow approach that Unilever and others may have taken. Further and more mature consideration may lead them to a different conclusion.

The jobs created by inward investors and the new industries that they have brought are not the full story. Inward investors are keen to source locally and the Welsh Development Agency's "source Wales" programme has played a vital role in ensuring that we maximise the potential that exists. The agency worked closely with indigenous companies, many of which have taken the opportunity to expand and create jobs to satisfy the often substantial needs generated by the likes of Sony, Panasonic and Toyota.

While large inward investors catch the headlines, we have always taken—and always will take—an active role in encouraging home-grown companies to develop. The support that we can and do provide to inward investors is available to indigenous companies under the same terms. Indeed, over the past 10 years the support provided to indigenous companies has exceeded that given to inward investors but inward investors tend to have the headline grabbing projects. The combined effect of this industrial development is the strengthening of our whole economy.

New inward investors and local sourcing replace imports. That is good news for the United Kingdom as a whole. Just as important, inward investors use this country as a springboard into Europe. Many have achieved the Queen's award for export achievement, some more than once, and there are even examples of Japanese companies in Wales exporting back to Japan.

[Mr. Jones]

As my hon. Friend and I know, the single market offers many opportunities for our home-grown companies as well as our inward investors. It is a market of almost 400 million consumers, many of whom are developing and many of whom aspire to those things that we in the west have taken for granted.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that there are many good things happening in Wales, both in his constituency of the Vale of Glamorgan and up and down principality. Those will continue as long as we resist the dreadful, job-destroying twin threats—the social chapter and the minimum wage from Europe and the totally unnecessary bureaucracy of a Welsh Assembly—that would stifle further development in Wales.

Ambulance Services (Pembrokeshire)

12.59 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I have requested this debate today because, although the Pembrokeshire ambulance service operating as part of the Pembrokeshire national health service trust offers an excellent, cost-efficient, fast and effective service to the people of Pembrokeshire, that service is under threat for the second time in the space of a year.

Last summer, the Welsh Ambulance Policy Advisory Group—WAPAG—consisting of the chairmen and chief executives of each of the Welsh ambulance trusts, proposed a reconfiguration of ambulance services in Wales, forming three new health trusts. It was proposed that the whole of Dyfed Powys and Morgannwg health authority areas be covered by one ambulance trust—the Mid and West Wales ambulance trust—that north Wales be covered by another, and south Wales by a third. The existing trusts were to be dissolved and replaced by the new trusts in April 1997. The proposed Mid and West Wales ambulance trust would cover a geographical area of 1.2 million hectares and a population of 976,000, and would have a road length of more than 16,000 km.

A massive campaign was organised in Pembrokeshire by Unison in the ambulance service, by the community health council, by town and community councils, and by local representatives of all political parties. This morning, I welcome some 27 people from all over Pembrokeshire, who represent town and community councils, and Unison representing the ambulance service. They have collected more than 60,000 signatures in a petition opposing the abolition of the Pembrokeshire ambulance service. I shall present that petition on the Floor of the House tonight.

Following the campaign and the objections to the proposal from the Pembrokeshire NHS trust and SEWAT—the South and East Wales NHS ambulance trust—it appeared that the plans for centralisation of ambulance services in Wales had been quietly dropped. The people of Pembrokeshire breathed a sigh of relief—but that was not the end of the story.

In the guise of evaluating the response of the eight-minute Orcon standard, WAPAG produced in December a project initiation document, the objectives of which included looking again at the configuration of ambulance services in Wales. The document states:

"encouragement to proceed has been received from the Under-Secretary of State for Health"—

that is, the Welsh Office Minister who is on the Treasury Bench today. WAPAG intends to submit joint proposals to the Welsh Office by June 1997, with a view to public consultation in autumn 1997 and introduction of the new trust arrangements in April 1998.

My main concern is that those proposals will again involve the abolition of the Pembrokeshire ambulance service. The prediction is that WAPAG will produce a report stating that there should be one ambulance service for the whole of Wales, possibly managed as three divisions—in other words, a rehash of the original WAPAG proposal for three ambulance trusts, but under a single Welsh badge. That could be, quite literally, a tragedy for Pembrokeshire and for the rest of Wales.

Part of the proposal is to evaluate a single ambulance control for Wales, but that would remove the tremendous advantages that come from having local ambulance

controls, such as the ambulance control in Pembrokeshire, which is based at Withybush general hospital. A centralised management system with central control lacks the flexibility to respond to a range of incidents, including major events in remote parts of Wales such as Pembrokeshire.

Even if control and management were in a divisional tier—for example, if it were based at Swansea—in the event of a major incident at one of the oil refineries at Milford Haven, incident control could be established only when the major incident team had collected a major incident vehicle and driven the 60 miles from Swansea, arriving up to an hour and half after the notification of the start of the incident. By that time, without an incident control assessing the on-site risk, the first local crews to reach the scene could have been seriously injured through being dispatched into a dangerous area with no prior on-site assessment. That happened on board the Pointsman—a tanker on which there was a series of explosions resulting in deaths in 1984 at Milford docks.

That problem could be overcome by operating in the same manner as the fire service, with local divisional offices, five of which would be needed to man a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week rota in Pembrokeshire alone; but that would add at least £100,000 to ambulance service costs in Pembrokeshire, thus wiping out any marginal savings from centralised control and management of the ambulance service. On an all-Wales basis, using the unitary authority areas, that would mean additional costs of at least £1.2 million.

The local control considerably expedites the emergency response, which is even more vital now that all British Telecom 999 services come from Cardiff, and the control staff are regularly faced with misdirected calls, or have to interpret the whereabouts of visitors who have no local knowledge.

On a day-to-day level, there are significant advantages to local control within the district general hospital. It gives the hospital advance warning of building pressures as emergency work levels rise; enables discharges within an hour that are required to free beds for incoming emergencies; and saves £150,000 per year compared to manning a separate control, a hospital switchboard and community nurse communication system.

Throughout peak periods during the past two years, Withybush was the only hospital in the south Wales corridor to continue to admit emergency cases. At no time did the accident and emergency department based at Withybush hospital have to close its doors—unlike every other accident and emergency department in district general hospitals in south and west Wales, all of which have had to close at some time during the past two years.

The ambulance service in Pembrokeshire benefits enormously from the commitment of its staff and from a modern standardised specialist fleet carrying the equipment necessary to tackle the sort of emergencies faced in the area; but that was not always so. In the early 1980s, when the service returned to Pembrokeshire, it inherited a dilapidated and rundown fleet and disheartened staff who had no clear sense of identity with the service. Now the staff have built a team spirit and developed a range of specialist new skills and services.

Ambulance personnel have been integrated into the cliff rescue teams that are situated around the Pembrokeshire coastline, and the commitment of the staff is such that all the training and exercises involved have been carried out in their own time and at no cost to the NHS trust. Those taking part in paramedic training have also put in many hours of unpaid overtime.

There is a danger that that sort of dedication would quickly evaporate in a large ambulance trust with no sense of identity and serving many different hospitals. A medical priority dispatch service has also been introduced, enabling ambulance staff to give assistance over the phone that will help to save lives. Pembrokeshire ambulance service has consistently met Orcon standards, which are traditionally very difficult for a rural service to achieve. Again, that is down to the commitment of the management and staff.

Remote management of ambulance services on an all-Wales basis, or through the three-trust model, would reinforce the technical needs of the service for digitised geographical information systems, computerised ambulance location systems and computer-aided dispatch systems. For a large central control, those typically cost approximately £500,000 per system, and their performance has been patchy to say the least, especially in the mountainous terrain that covers most of Wales. With local knowledge, good relations between ambulance crews and control and good working systems between local doctors, hospital consultants and the ambulance service, the public get a better service, without the need for such expensive technology.

The proposal to create either one or three large ambulance trusts clearly poses a threat to the quality of the service in Pembrokeshire and the rest of Wales, but it is also likely to lead to large cost increases. The document prepared by WAPAG for the Welsh Office last year, which attempted to justify the merger of ambulance services in Wales, compared the unit cost incurred by the Pembrokeshire ambulance service with forecast equivalent figures for the proposed Mid and West Wales ambulance trust. Out of five areas performance-costed, the present arrangements under the Pembrokeshire NHS trust were found to be substantially cheaper per unit in three categories, and only marginally more expensive in the other two, than the estimated cost for the proposed new ambulance trust.

The cost of every 999 call attended would rocket from £230.72 now in Pembrokeshire to £265.29 under the proposed Mid and West Wales trust. The cost of the ambulance service per head of population would increase from £11.66 to £12.59, and the cost of each medical services staff member would increase from £32,317 to £38,776.

The Pembrokeshire ambulance service is recognised as a local service. The proposed changes cannot be justified on the grounds of cost or benefit to patients; the only motivation is to tackle the disaster that is SEWAT—a complete failure, because it was too big, inefficient and failed patients—but one does not solve a problem like SEWAT by creating what is potentially an even bigger disaster.

Obviously, that is not a reason to disband a highly effective service which has local knowledge and the expertise to deal with the types of incidents likely to arise in Pembrokeshire, or a good enough reason to throw away the advantages of the relationships that have been built up between the ambulance service, the hospitals and the doctors in the trust.

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

The Minister has expressed his support for the WAPAG review, both to the group and in a written answer to me. The project initiation document dated 3 December 1996 states:

"encouragement to proceed has been received from the Under-Secretary"

of State

"for Health",

and the Minister told me in his written answer:

"I welcome the work being undertaken by the Welsh ambulance policy advisory group."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. *159*.]

However, in encouraging WAPAG in that project, he is supporting further moves away from local control of the health service in Wales, promised by the Conservative party before the last general election.

In April 1996, the number of health authorities in Wales was reduced from eight to five, with Pembrokeshire losing its health authority. The Pembrokeshire health authority was swallowed up by the huge Dyfed Powys health authority, covering half the surface of Wales. Control and influence has been removed from local areas to faceless management in distant locations. Any centralisation of ambulance services will further strain people's identity with their supposedly local health service.

Given the considerable advantages of the locally based Pembrokeshire service, in which other hospital trusts have expressed a great deal of interest, WAPAG should now ensure that the benefits of the Pembrokeshire model are fully evaluated, with a view to applying them throughout Wales, instead of choosing a huge, centralised single trust, or the three-trust model, both of which will be costly and may lead to a deterioration in the quality of service provided, not only in Pembrokeshire but throughout Wales.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), who visited Withybush general hospital last year and saw the control arrangements for the ambulance service, and who will in the next few weeks take up ministerial responsibilities for health in Wales under a new Labour Government, has assured me that he will ensure that any review of the ambulance service in Wales closely examines the locally based model that has been so successful in Pembrokeshire. I urge the Minister now, in the last days of his Government, to give a similar assurance, and remove from the Pembrokeshire ambulance service the threat that he has, until today, encouraged and supported.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) also wants to make a contribution, and I now conclude my remarks; but I remind the Minister that the health service in Pembrokeshire was a major issue in the 1992 general election campaign, and I am sure that his responses today will be part of the forthcoming general election campaign.

1.13 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly on an important subject. I want to raise an issue of which the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) is aware—the ambulance service in north Pembrokeshire—and to point out that there is significant concern about levels of cover and response times there. That concern has led to a demand for the establishment of an ambulance station in Crymych, and the offer by the local community council to provide the land and the building for such an ambulance station—an offer that should not be lightly dismissed.

I have been in correspondence on that subject with many people, including the Minister. The chief executive of the West Wales Ambulance NHS trust, Mr. Butcher, tells me in a reply to a letter from me that that is a matter not for him but for the health authority, because it is the authority that will have to contract for the continuing cost to the service even though the basic infrastructure—the building—would be provided free, and he says that the health authority would probably say that it could not afford to deliver that service.

We know about the financial problems of the Dyfed Powys health authority. Those issues need to be addressed by the Welsh Office in terms of the funding of the health authority. In view of the lack of movement on that matter, one must ask, how do the health authority, the trust and all concerned propose to ensure that the eight-minute response time for immediately life-threatening conditions recommended in the NHS Executive review on the ambulance service is met? That response time applies to rural and urban areas, in recognition of the fact that there should be equality regarding such an important service.

Mr. Butcher writes that methods other than the establishment of an ambulance station in Crymych might be developed to ensure that the response level requirement is met. He suggests that there should be more co-ordination between the two trusts. Currently, the ad hoc arrangements that exist for co-operation between the West Wales and the Pembrokeshire trusts are very much a one-way affair.

The Cardigan ambulance has made 121 calls in the past eight months in north Pembrokeshire to meet demand there. By contrast, there have been only two calls by the Pembrokeshire ambulance in Ceredigion itself. I understand that that service from Cardigan to north Pembrokeshire imposes significant strains on the service, which can no longer be ignored.

Unless we get an ambulance station in Crymych, the responsible bodies must come together to ensure that the response times that will be required and which should be delivered are delivered in that area. The people of that part of Pembrokeshire are very worried about that.

1.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to the points that have been made by the hon. Members for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) and for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis). I hope to be able to give considerable reassurance to people in Pembrokeshire and to those who take a close interest in Pembrokeshire ambulance provision.

I regard ambulance provision as an integral part of health care, vital to our well-being. Especially in recent years, the Pembrokeshire ambulance service, although relatively small, with a staff of slightly more than 60, has proved to be committed to providing the best quality for Pembrokeshire patients. We can see that in many ways, not least in the fact that it has met patients charter standards.

Last year, the Pembrokeshire ambulance service responded to 95 per cent. of emergency calls within 21 minutes, and more than 50 per cent. within eight minutes. That is a considerable achievement, given the rurality of Pembrokeshire and the unmarked roads in the more sparsely populated areas. I am sure that that is a tribute to the ability and commitment of all who work for Pembrokeshire ambulance, most obviously the drivers but equally everyone else involved.

Here I find myself in full agreement with what the hon. Member for Pembroke said about those working for Pembrokeshire ambulance. The excellent response rate was also achieved despite an 8 per cent. increase in emergency calls over the previous year.

On paramedics, the Pembrokeshire ambulance service has again shown its resourcefulness in meeting our requirement that each front-line ambulance should be manned by at least one fully trained paramedic. Pembrokeshire expects to be able to comply by June this year, and would have done so earlier, but for the ill health of two staff members. The Government firmly believe that getting a fully trained paramedic to the scene of an incident as quickly as possible is the right way to save lives.

Almost 8,000 emergency and urgent patients and about 63,000 other patients were carried by Pembrokeshire ambulance service in 1995–96. The staff deserve the highest commendation that we can offer them.

The hon. Member for Pembroke makes much of what he calls the threat for the second time. He indulges in wild exaggeration, which is typical of someone who prefers to live in the realm of conspiracy theories. Inevitably, the reality is entirely different from what he claims.

I have been impressed by the various organisations and individuals who have taken an interest in the proper question of ambulance provision in Pembrokeshire. I have read all the letters, and it is appropriate to refer to them.

The clerks of Haverfordwest town council, Neyland town council, Havens community council, Fishguard and Goodwick town council, Milford Haven town council, Pembroke town council, Redbaxton community council, Burton community council, Llangwm Hook community council and Narberth town council all felt it necessary to write to me. Mr. H. E. Baker of St. Florence, Tenby has written, as has, not surprisingly, Mrs. Val Sanders, the agent of the Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire Conservative and Unionist Association.

Later today, I will be meeting Mr. O. J. Williams, who is bringing a representative of Pembrokeshire ambulance service to see me. I will be in Crymych next week at the invitation of Mr. Robert Buckland to see the situation there at first hand. Some hon. Members may not know that Mr. O. J. Williams is the prospective Conservative candidate for Carmarthen, West and South Pembrokeshire, and Mr. Robert Buckland is the prospective Conservative candidate for Preselli and Pembrokeshire.

That is the distinguished list of people and organisations who have made representations on the matter, which I have carefully noted. I acknowledge that the hon. Member for Pembroke has asked me four questions on the matter—three last May and one in January—and the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) has written to me twice on the subject of ambulances in Pembrokeshire.

The hon. Member for Pembroke gave the game away in his concluding remarks, when he referred to the last general election and the coming general election. He has suddenly woken up to the matter of Pembrokeshire ambulance service, because of the activities of O. J. Williams and Robert Buckland. It is another example of a nervous Labour Member of Parliament in a very marginal seat who has decreasing confidence in the possibility of his being in the next House of Commons.

I must tell both hon. Gentlemen that any proposals to reconfigure overall ambulance provision are matters for the ambulance trusts and those involved with ambulance operations in the case of Pembrokeshire, in conjunction with their respective commissioners—health authorities and hospital NHS trusts.

I have not asked for an expression of interest to change the shape of ambulance trusts anywhere in Wales, or set any timetable for its submission. I am surprised by the fears expressed about a review being undertaken by the Welsh Ambulance Policy and Advisory Group to determine how ambulance provision can be improved. Indeed, I would be more worried if NHS trusts were not constantly looking for improvements, particularly when the most important priority is the constant pursuit of higher standards for patients through quicker response times for the most urgent cases.

The group's review involves and is supported by all Welsh ambulance operations, including Pembrokeshire's. The group intends to maintain good communications with representatives of health authorities and other NHS trusts. I and the Welsh Office health department have made it clear that, in the interests of improvements always being considered, the work being undertaken by the group is welcomed.

I emphasise, however, that that work has not been requested by me or by any other or previous Minister in the Welsh Office; nor is the group's work being paid for by the Welsh Office.

Mr. Ainger: In the original WAPAG document produced last summer, only one choice is offered—three trusts covering the whole of Wales. The second document, dated December, giving a project overview, states:

"The programme of work set out in this PID follows from the outline expression of interest developed by the WAPAG reconfiguration team and the commissioner attitude survey undertaken by Grant Thornton. Subsequently, encouragement to proceed has been received from the Under-Secretary for Health and WAPAG agreed to submit joint proposals to the Welsh Office by June 1997."

How can the Minister deny that?

Mr. Jones: I have just told the hon. Gentleman, as I said to him in answer to the question that he asked in January, that such work is always welcome. I would be disappointed if health professionals in Wales were not giving serious consideration to ways in which provision could be improved, in relation to ambulances or any other activity of the NHS.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): The Minister cannot wriggle out of the question. The document by the chief ambulance officers in Wales through their membership of WAPAG referred to specific encouragement by the Under-Secretary of State, whom I understand to be the hon. Member for Cardiff,

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

North (Mr. Jones). He cannot wriggle out of the question by saying that there is a general move towards achieving quicker response times. There is a reference to specific encouragement by him for the submission of the second document. Is he denying that, or is he saying that the people on WAPAG do not know what they are talking about?

Mr. Jones: The situation is as I said. I know that it would not be understood by the hon. Gentleman, who constantly displays his lack of understanding of the health service in Wales. I have not asked for any particular thing to be done, I am not directing it, and I am not paying for it, but I would be disappointed if any part of the health service in Wales was not giving serious professional consideration to improvements. Only after such consideration can we find ways forward.

It is clear that there is great strength of feeling on several matters. I have emphasised how essential it is for any review to address all the possible options, and for it to be based on hard information, and to reach conclusions about genuine patient benefits and value-for-money savings. I expect all those involved with ambulances to co-operate in providing whatever information is necessary.

I am aware of the group's objective to submit joint proposals for the future provision of ambulances in Wales by June this year. If the proposals include a possible reconfiguration of NHS trusts—I would consider proposals only if they clearly demonstrated benefits to patients and value for money—they would be subject to public consultation in the usual way.

I readily reassure the House that the group is a useful body, consisting of the chairmen and chief executives of the various ambulance NHS trusts in Wales. The group provides a good consultative forum for developing ambulance policy initiatives and best practice. One of my officials is generally invited to attend as an observer. That enables the Welsh Office to keep in touch with ambulance operation and secure good advice from the professionals on policy development. It is a further welcome sign of NHS trusts working together to provide better health care for the people of Wales.

Mr. Dafis: Will the Minister encourage those concerned to develop a specific scheme to meet the needs of the people of north Pembrokeshire, by ensuring much closer co-ordination or the provision of an ambulance station in Crymych?

Mr. Jones: I give my fullest commitment to the best possible provision of ambulances in Pembrokeshire and throughout Wales, but that must be evolved locally. I cannot anticipate whether there will be any change. I shall certainly not impose any change. If proposals come forward, they must all be subjected to the fullest consultation locally. Only then will I consider them.

While I shall bear in mind value for money, my overriding consideration will be whether proposals will benefit patients. All I am interested in is whether any proposed changes will bring about improvements in Pembrokeshire, west Wales or elsewhere in Wales, rather than Opposition Members' ridiculous conspiracy theories.

Fire Services (Essex)

1.29 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I apologise to the Minister for coming to him twice within one week, but he will appreciate that this important and serious issue relates to the financing and operation of fire brigades and the special problems in Essex.

Thanks to the courtesy of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), I had the pleasure of speaking in his debate last week. I shall try to speak briefly so that he might have the opportunity to do the same in mine.

Most colleagues are aware of the difficulties in getting problems resolved. Essex, including Rochford, faces a serious problem. It is not unusual, when such constituency problems arise, for hon. Members to shout a great deal, but I hope that the fact that hon. Members from all parties in Essex have co-operated on this will prove to the Minister that this is an extremely serious issue.

That fact has also been demonstrated by the meetings of local residents. Indeed, some of the consultation meetings have resembled nasty boxing matches. I attended a meeting in Rochford, which was delightfully chaired by the deputy mayor, Councillor Heather Glynn, who, although not from my party, was clearly a respected person in the community. The meeting was so large that we had to add another full meeting.

The points made by residents are simple: first, the calls on the brigades have increased; secondly, the number of buildings at risk have increased; and, thirdly, the principles on which those reports are based seem to be out of date, given the problems of trying to conform to travel time requirements.

In trying to resolve the problems, the hon. Member for Thurrock and I have been frustrated by different public authorities. I have felt a certain frustration with the Government, although I love them all dearly.

To try to ensure that we had accurate information before this debate, I tabled a "W" question asking simply how much money had been provided by the Government within standard spending assessments for fire authority operations and how much had been spent. I thought that that information would be available, but the answer that I received yesterday, as the Minister will be aware, was that the Government would provide the information shortly—no doubt after the debate. It would be nice to know that basic fact, because the information we have is that, in almost every major county, there is excessive expenditure.

I have also felt a certain frustration with the county. Although it has made it clear to hon. Members that it would like more money, it unfortunately did not apply for it by 10 January, as it should have. It says that it sent a nice letter to the Minister expressing concern, but did not make the appropriate application.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), who is a resident of Rochford, and I, as a resident of Southend, offered to arrange meetings with Ministers to try to resolve the problem if the county would drop its quota proposals in the meantime, it sadly extended the consultation period, and said that the issue could not be prejudged. Essex Members are afraid that something will be done after the consultation period, unfortunately without the issue being as carefully resolved as would be appropriate.

I want the Minister to consider six specific questions and give some guidance on them. First, is the money provided for fire stations within the standard spending assessments for the counties inadequate, and, if so, why?

After I had looked for guidance on the Government's views on fire services, the only major report that I could locate was a wonderful report by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 1992. In his fundamental review, he pointed out four alarming developments: first, that fires, fire casualties and fire losses were increasing; secondly, that more deaths and injuries were being caused in the home than anywhere else from any other activity; thirdly, that there were prevention problems; and, fourthly, that performance indicators were needed.

None the less, we are well aware that, in most counties, financing appears to be inadequate within the overall settlement. We want to know why that is so. Counties throughout the country will not spend more on one activity unless there is a special need for it.

The second issue on which I would appreciate guidance is whether provision is made in the settlement for a major national activity within a county—for example, the airport at Stansted, which requires more fire cover. It would be unfortunate if fire stations were removed from the south of the county because of problems in a national airport, which is basically not a county responsibility.

Thirdly, is there a case for reviewing the principles on the basis of which the reviews are carried out? It strikes me that the enormous increase in traffic and congestion since the principles were drawn up has created a new problem.

Fourthly, retained firefighters are extremely relevant and significant, especially in Rochford, where we have a temporary station. However, a new problem has been created by the jobseeker's allowance. I am sure that the allowance is splendid, and that the Government introduced it as an exciting new development, but it is alleged that special problems are being created because the jobseeker's allowance takes such a form that those who previously worked part time as retained fire officers now find it difficult to do so because of the allowance's provisions.

The fifth point on which I would appreciate guidance relates to the interim budget published by the county council. I have no wish to enter into battle with the county council, although a different party is in charge, but this is a point of principle. The county council proposes a cut of £651,000 in the cost of employment, which would undoubtedly mean a reduction in the number employed.

I understand that any such reduction will bring some stations under complement, and that special approval will be required from the Government under section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. If any such proposals were made to reduce the number of firefighters and put stations below the appropriate number, will special Government permission be required?

My sixth point is important, and I should appreciate the Minister's views on it. Will he confirm that the closure proposals cannot go ahead unless the Government say that they are in accordance with the principles for the fire service? It is important for the local community to know that, after 1 May and whichever party is in charge, the county council will need Government approval for any proposed closures of fire stations.

Given the special problems in Essex, it would be immensely helpful if the Minister could confirm that Government approval would be required. If a review of the Essex fire service were being considered, it could then be established whether it was working efficiently, as both the county and the fire service claim, and whether it was fulfilling its obligations. That is important for the local community, so that we can see whether the Government will make a decision on the basis of the facts.

Although the hard-working Minister, whom I admire for taking his responsibility seriously, must sit on the Front Bench and hear complaints from hon. Members on both sides of the House, he should appreciate that this is not simply hon. Members shouting for their constituencies. The fact that the hon. Member for Thurrock make his excellent speech last week without trying to make party politics, and that hon. Members on this side of the House who agree on nothing have worked together, show that this is a point of principle.

Southend-on-Sea faces the possibility of three local fire stations closing, and local residents are genuinely alarmed and concerned. I was present in Southend when we had the big fire on the pier, and when a huge fire took place in a factory in Southchurch road. It is alarming. The official figures show that fires are increasing and public safety is very much at risk. If the Government can look at this issue seriously and with interest, they will genuinely provide some comfort to the people of Southend, Rochford, Canvey Island and other places.

I emphasise to the Government that this is a real and serious issue. It must be addressed. It cannot be swept under the carpet, and Members of Parliament—from all parties—who represent Essex are absolutely adamant that we will not allow it to happen.

1.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I shall be brief, as I do not wish to rehearse the arguments that I advanced last week.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and to reinforce his point that, nationally, the fire service is underfunded. I hope that that matter is addressed, whatever the political complexion of Her Majesty's Government, because it is a much-valued service.

My second point relates to airports. As the House knows, the police service is fully chargeable to the owners and operators of airports, and there is a compelling case for the fire service facilities that are provided as a back-up to the airport's fire service to be wholly, or at least in part, charged to airport operators. I recognise that these are much wider long-term policy issues, but I hope that the Government will consider them.

Another point that needs to be reinforced is that Essex county council asked for a meeting with Baroness Blatch, but at the time that was felt inappropriate. Now, the hon. Member for Southend, East has offered to use his good offices in pressing for a meeting with Ministers. I support that, but I understand that the county council now says that it does not think that a meeting will be appropriate or useful. I hope that the Minister will, on his own initiative, following the representations of hon. Members, say that there will be a meeting without preconditions.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The suggestion by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and myself was that, if the

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

county would drop its plans in the meantime, we would be glad to seek meetings. That would be the right way to go ahead. Then we could have meetings without preconditions. I am sure that the hon. Member for Thurrock will agree, in view of the strength of his opinion and the fight that he is putting up for his local residents, that the best first step would be to drop the proposals and then to talk.

Mr. Mackinlay: I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman on this matter. There needs to be a meeting. The county council should follow the hon. Gentleman's advice on this and meet the Minister. I hope that, when the Minister replies, he will say that his door is open and that he will write to the county council and invite it to come along and have a chinwag about this very serious crisis.

If, as a consequence of the review or the county council's budget, there is to be a reduction in the number of fire personnel, appliances or fire stations, I hope that the Minister will say that there will be an inquiry under section 19. It is very important. We, the people of Essex, want our day in court on this matter, and to be able to rehearse to the Government and the county council the full extent and ramifications of any reduction in fire service provision in the county.

Regardless of whether there is a meeting—I hope that there will be one—there should be an inquiry if there is any diminution in the level of fire cover in our county as a result of the review or the budget reductions.

1.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) on securing this debate, which mirrors the debate that we had only a week ago on the same subject.

My hon. Friend has expressed strong concerns about the provision of fire services in Essex. I understand the concern that hon. Members and their constituents feel about the quality of their fire service and the sensitivities that inevitably surround any proposals, such as those under consideration in Essex, to change the arrangements for providing fire cover. My hon. Friend took part in last week's debate on fire services in Essex, which was initiated by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay).

I appreciate that the subject of today's debate goes a little wider than the particular concerns of Essex, but many of the same issues arise, so I hope that my hon. Friend will bear with me if I repeat some of the points that I made a week ago.

We have every reason to be proud of our fire service. As the Audit Commission said, we can be proud of the fire service's record in responding to incidents, the high level of skill and professionalism it shows, and its very able managers and courageous front-line staff. The Government wholeheartedly endorse those sentiments. Essex has a particularly high standard, and met the required response times to fire calls on 96 per cent. of occasions.

On the specific question of proposed changes to fire provision locally, I should make it clear that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has a specific and limited role under section 19 of the Act. He is required to be notified of the number of the fire authority's fire stations, fire appliances and firefighting posts as at 1 January each year. The fire authority may not reduce its establishment—although it can increase it—without his specific consent.

As I explained last week, my right hon. and learned Friend grants those approvals only where he is satisfied that the authority has consulted properly about its proposals and considered any representations, and where Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services advises that the nationally recommended fire cover standards will be maintained.

We have not received any section 19 application from Essex about the proposals that have been made in respect of its fire cover review. All fire authorities review their fire cover arrangements periodically to keep them up to date. I know that Essex county council is currently consulting about its proposals.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does my hon. Friend regret the county council's new policy to delay its decision on this matter until after the county elections on 1 May? That delay is causing great anxiety to all the people of Essex, particularly those who live on Canvey Island.

Mr. Sackville: I certainly condemn any delay motivated by politics. If the council is trying to seek changes, it should come up front with them and bring them forward at such time as it is ready. Obviously I cannot speak in any detail about what is happening with those proposals, but I hope that they will be brought forward promptly. It would be quite wrong for such political interests to become involved.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Does my hon. Friend understand that one of the consequences of the delay is an inability to implement policies that would protect the service? Is he further aware that the Conservative opposition on the county council will produce a budget next week that protects the number of firefighters and stations?

Given the overall position of the county council, which enjoyed the largest reserves last year of any county council and still enjoys a very large reserve, is my hon. Friend not left with the impression that the Liberal and Labour controlling group are relying on the good will of Conservative Members by using these tactics, when it is quite clear that there are alternatives that protect stations and firefighters?

Mr. Sackville: I cannot go into whether the council should make section 19 applications, but I reiterate what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point. If it is to make any applications, it should do so promptly. Any delay in bringing them forward will undoubtedly add to the problems of forward planning. I hope that the people who make those decisions will hear what my hon. Friends have said. I hope that the county council will listen very carefully to the points that hon. Members have made in this debate and in the debate last week.

In the event that a section 19 application is made, my right hon. and learned Friend will also take into account any representations made directly to him.

I assure hon. Members that, should the county council make such an application, my right hon. and learned Friend, in reaching his decision, will take full account of the representations that he receives, including those made in this debate. In answer to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East, it is my clear understanding that any major change of the sort to which he referred would have to be the subject of a section 19 application.

Mention has been made of the power that my right hon. and learned Friend has under section 19(8) of the 1947 Act to hold a public local inquiry. That has happened very occasionally in the past, but it is always open to the Home Secretary to do so in any such application.

I referred last week to the national recommended standards, which various hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East, have called into question. Those standards dictate the initial response to a fire in terms of weight and speed of attack. They rest on four main standards of service according to the risk category in which an area has been placed, and assume for each category that a predetermined number of firefighting appliances should attend within a certain time.

The standards are not just nationally recommended: they are nationally agreed in the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, which is constituted under the Fire Services Act 1947 to represent fire service interests. The council undertook an extensive review of the standards in 1985. They enable all concerned to know where they stand as regards the minimum level of service that should be delivered.

As I said last week, we believe that those standards have served us well, but that does not mean that we regard them as unchangeable or incapable of improvement. The Audit Commission has recommended that there should be a further review of the levels of fire cover. It recognised, however, that no fundamental change should be considered without careful research. A review of fire cover standards is being taken forward by the joint committee of the advisory councils for England, Wales and Scotland.

Dr. Spink: I agree with what my hon. Friend said about fire standards. They are probably appropriate, and I am delighted that he is examining them. However, the problem is not the standards themselves, but the assumptions made when using those standards to calculate where fire resources should be placed in Essex.

Those assumptions are inappropriate in that they assume an average speed of 30 mph for all areas of Essex, when clearly the average speed attainable by fire engines in the north and rural areas is far greater than the average speed attainable by fire engines trying to get on to Canvey Island or through Hadleigh, which is very congested. The problem is the assumptions that are made in applying the standards in this specific case.

Mr. Sackville: That shows the need for a further review. Another example of the problem is the existence of a major international airport. Those considerations must form part of the review.

The Government have shown their commitment to the fire service by confirming, in the final local government settlement, that we shall increase the fire service element of standard spending assessment in England for the coming year by £50 million, which is an increase of more than 4 per cent. I believe that that is a satisfactory settlement. Within that, we must expect a continued search for efficiency savings, as with any organisation in the public or private sector anywhere in the country. Many parts of both sectors have found such savings.

It was notable that the Audit Commission's report said that, if all fire services came up to the level of the best—if, indeed, that is the best achievable, and it may not be—considerable savings would be possible without effecting the standard of fire cover. All fire services must take that into account.

The fire standard spending assessment distribution formula takes into account a number of factors. The problem with any proposal to change the formula is to find an alternative that does not unreasonably increase the grant to some brigades and disproportionately reduce it to others. Many counties feel that they have specific characteristics that make them a special case.

If local authority representative organisations—or a single organisation in the future—were to agree on a new formula, the Government would consider carefully how they could improve allocation among the counties. This matter is not simple: one county may believe that it has particular difficulties, whereas there may be special difficulties of a completely different nature in other parts of the country, such as remote or hilly regions, that must be taken into account.

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Following my hon. Friend's speech last week, stories appeared in local newspapers saying, "Minister supports cuts" or "Minister supports closure of local fire stations". Is he a little surprised to learn that that is how his speech last week was interpreted?

Mr. Sackville: I shall consult *Hansard*, but I think that I will find that I never said any such thing. I said very clearly that, if applications were received to reduce provision at any fire station or part thereof, the Home Secretary would have to make a decision. I want to put the record straight. No decisions have been taken on any reduction in provision.

Mr. Mackinlay: I want to take a bipartisan approach to this matter. I was present last week, and the Minister certainly did not say that. If any grotty newspaper said he did, it should read *Hansard*. I do not know who the guilty party is, but I want to make it clear that the Minister listened to us and did not say that. There should be accurate reporting of this matter.

Mr. Sackville: I do not know to which grotty newspapers in his constituency the hon. Gentleman is referring.

Mr. Mackinlay: It is not one in my constituency.

Mr. Sackville: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support.

[Mr. Sackville]

If Essex county council feels that it does not have sufficient resources, various options are open to it. As has already been said, it had an opportunity to meet Ministers at the Department of the Environment to discuss the rate support grant settlement, but chose not to do so. If the authority were to set a budget above its cap, the county would have an opportunity—which I am sure it would take—to put its case to Ministers in person and to challenge the level at which it was designated.

It must also be kept in mind that fire service spending in Essex during the current year is £39.3 million out of a total base budget of £976.7 million: so it represents about 4 per cent. of total county spending. If the council cannot find savings elsewhere in administration, it could increase the amount of resources that it allocates to fire to more than the current planned level. I am sure that the people of Essex would expect the council to do just that.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Because of the shortage of time, would the Minister respond in writing to my questions, especially that on the jobseeker's allowance?

Mr. Sackville: I am happy to respond to that specific question. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend receives a letter within a short time.

Mr. Mackinlay: I want to make it quite clear that the newspapers in my constituency report these debates with clarity and precision: it was certainly not a newspaper in my area. I feel sorry for the hon. Members who are not covered by the *Thurrock Gazette* and the *Thurrock Recorder*.

Mr. Sackville: I am grateful for that assurance.

It being two minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nigeria

1. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussion he has had with the Nigerian military Government concerning the restoration of democratic institutions to Nigeria. [13954]

15. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current human rights situation in Nigeria. [13968]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): I apologise for the absence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, who is attending the ministerial meeting in Singapore between the Association of South-East Asian Nations and the European Union.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development held discussions with the Nigerian authorities at the highest level, most recently during the Commonwealth ministerial action group visit in November. We remain extremely concerned about the human rights situation in Nigeria, and the lack of progress towards the restoration of democracy in that country.

Mr. Bruce: My hon. Friend is right to be very cautious about any promises that come from the military regime. As he will know, Members of Parliament attended the presidential election as observers. It was clear that Chief Abiola won that election, and that the military regime simply discarded the result. Can my hon. Friend be certain that the regime's current assurances about restoring democracy are real, or are they merely illusory?

Dr. Fox: We continue to monitor progress with the transitional timetable. The local elections on a party basis, which are now due on 15 March, are the next important benchmark, and they must be free and fair.

Mr. Pike: The Minister will know that 19 Ogoni activists are still being held in prison, on charges similar to those applying to the nine who were executed in 1995 under a seriously flawed legal system. The prisoners are being held in appalling conditions, and it has been said that one has gone blind as a result. What do the British Government feel they can do to ensure that those people are released as soon as possible, and that human rights are restored in Nigeria?

Dr. Fox: I raised those points myself in a recent Adjournment debate. We have made representations about prison conditions. We have made it clear to the Nigerian authorities that we expect the Ogoni 19 to be released—or to be brought to a properly constituted court that respects human rights—and that any further trials by the tribunal that tried Ken Saro Wiwa would provoke an extremely serious international reaction.

Sir David Steel: Is the Minister making particular representations to the Nigerian authorities about the continued detention of General Obasanjo? Does he recognise that the general was the only president of Nigeria—the only military ruler, that is—who handed over to a democracy, and that since then he has played a distinguished part in providing democracy throughout the continent of Africa? His continued detention is an international outrage.

Dr. Fox: The detention of political prisoners in Nigeria is indeed a cause for international outrage in many cases, as the Commonwealth ministerial action group made extremely plain during its last visit. We will continue to make that clear on every occasion. It is one of the most obvious abuses of human rights that we looked at.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Minister will remember that Nigeria played a role in bringing democracy to South Africa. Will he confirm that the Government have shared with the Nigerian authorities the idea that democracy has nothing to do with white and black, but has to do with the rights of people?

Dr. Fox: I entirely agree. We will take every opportunity to tell the Nigerian Government exactly what we expect from them. There must be a move towards proper democracy in that country: we cannot help it with aid projects and international finance if it does not respect human rights and basic democratic principles.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Does the Minister realise that, although I am sure that General Abacha took note of the recent Adjournment debate and the Minister's welcome comments, when the Commonwealth ministerial action group went to Nigeria, the fact that the Canadians were not part of the group gave a clear signal to General Abacha that little would come of that visit and that he used it for propaganda purposes? What tough action will we get from next week's CMAG meeting, and what signals will be given to Nigeria that the present lack of progress towards democracy is simply unacceptable?

Dr. Fox: CMAG does of course meet next week and it will make clear what we expect. At the meeting, we will demand the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Chief Abiola, the restoration of a democracy in which all can participate, the early resolution of the Ogoni 19 case, as I have already mentioned, and a review of prison conditions.

Cyprus

2. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Cyprus to discuss the recent increase in tension there. [13955]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has no present plans to visit Cyprus. He did so in December 1996, when he held discussions with President Clerides and Mr. Denktash.

Mr. Waterson: May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on what I believe was the first visit by a British Foreign Secretary to Cyprus for some 30 years? Will my right hon. Friend the Minister of State restate

the Government's commitment to relieving tension, where possible, in Cyprus, and to achieving a lasting settlement on that island? Does he agree that early accession to the European Union would benefit considerably both communities on the island?

Mr. Davis: Certainly. I first commend my hon. Friend on his hard work and perseverance on behalf of the people of Cyprus over a long period. He is right. The Foreign Secretary's visit did reflect our commitment to the interest of Cyprus's people and to achieving a solution to the Cyprus problem. We support accession to the European Union on the basis that it will benefit all Cyprus's people—in fact, people in north Cyprus will make particular financial gain—and in the hope that the accession process will help rather than hinder the resolution of the Cyprus problem.

Mr. Faulds: Will the right hon. Gentleman accept my additional congratulations to the Foreign Secretary on his sagacity, after many years of inaction by those on the Front Benches of both sides, that he should actually visit both communities in Cyprus? Will he accept from me—I do not think it is historically deniable—that these intrusions that are causing the tensions are invariably organised by Greek-Cypriot demonstrators? Is it not highly regrettable that involved in those demonstrations into the buffer territory, which is forbidden territory for both parties, are leading Members of the European Parliament?

Mr. Davis: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. What I will say is that we have to be even-handed with both communities. That is the secret to progress on the matter. When my right hon. and learned Friend went to Cyprus, he made a statement on a 10-point programme to promote the solution of the Cyprus problem. That programme has been lodged in the Library, and I recommend that the hon. Gentleman examines it.

Sir David Madel: If Turkish troops withdrew from northern Cyprus, which would be the first step in a solution, who do the Government think should then be responsible for guaranteeing the rights of the minority Turkish-Cypriot population?

Mr. Davis: There is a need for a reduction in military weaponry and presence on both sides. Only by that route will there be a reduction in the tensions that afflict Cyprus. Under the circumstances of accession to the EU and of a solution of the Cyprus problem, we would expect international guarantees for all Cyprus's people.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Minister will be aware that I also visited Cyprus last month. May I support his statement that Cyprus's accession to the European Union would both increase the sense of security of Cyprus's residents and increase pressure on Ankara to reach a settlement? Will he therefore tell the House that the British Government will not make settlement of the division of the island a precondition of Cyprus's accession to the European Union? Does he realise that to set such a precondition could create the danger of a Turkish veto?

Mr. Davis: I have said in the House several times that we have never accepted either an explicit or an implicit Turkish veto, and that we would not allow a situation to arise in which such a veto could be exercised. However, accession would undoubtedly be easier if there were a solution. To meet the Union's requirement for free movement of people—to give the right hon. Gentleman one simple example—would be rather difficult in the current circumstances.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I, too, congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary on paying a non-partisan visit to both sides of the island. Is my right hon. Friend aware that we remain the international guarantor of peace on the island, and that it is therefore very much our role to try to promote peace among both sides? Does he agree that the way in which to accomplish that is for both sides eventually to become members of the European Union, and that any arms build-up now by either side is extremely unhelpful?

Mr. Davis: I think that everything that my hon. Friend has said is entirely right. We have demonstrated our commitment to an active role in the promotion of peace, most recently—other than the Foreign Secretary's visit—by appointing Sir David Hannay to promote the cause of peace and a settlement on the island. We will do that in an even-handed manner, as vigorously and as effectively as we are capable.

International Criminal Court

3. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress to date in establishing an international criminal court. [13956]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor): We are actively contributing to the preparatory work for a diplomatic conference to finalise and adopt a convention for the establishment of an international criminal court.

Dr. Wright: Could anyone who saw this Monday's harrowing "Panorama" programme on Rwanda doubt that the need for an international criminal court is extremely urgent? Could it be true that, for reasons of cost, the United States is seeking to delay if not block next year's conference, which may launch such a court? Could it even be true, as the human rights report suggests, that the British Government are using blocking tactics on the proposal? Is not the most appropriate manner for the international community to open a new millennium to set up such an international criminal court? With our history and our traditions, should not we be giving a lead?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I certainly do agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is time we had an international criminal court, and the Government have been playing a very active role in both the ad hoc and the preparatory committee work. There is a great deal to be done before we reach the stage of being able to propose a detailed treaty that will establish such a court, but it is absolutely untrue that our Government are trying to block that move. We are encouraging it and working towards it. I cannot speak for the United States Government, but I know of no such action on their part, either.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. However, does he agree that there would be

much more credibility if only action were taken to bring Mr. Karadzic and Mr. Mladic before some type of international tribunal? Does he also agree that Mr. Milosevic should also be investigated when such a court is established?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I do not think that we should muddle an international criminal court, which is the subject of this question, and the ad hoc tribunal for war crimes, which has been set up with regard to Bosnia. Certainly I agree with my hon. Friend that those who are responsible for war crimes must be brought to that tribunal and tried for the crimes that they are alleged to have committed.

Mr. Macdonald: Does the Minister agree that it is important to prevent war crimes as well as to prosecute war criminals? What are the Government therefore doing about the situation in west Mostar, where ethnic cleansing has been resumed against Muslim civilians by the local Croat mafia? Is that not in complete defiance of the Dayton agreement?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is referring to a specific area. The question is on establishing an international criminal court. It is totally unfair that he should attempt to raise a specific issue when we are dealing with a general one.

China

4. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans has he to make an official visit to China to discuss United Kingdom–Sino relations. [13957]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has at present no plans to visit China. However, he will meet the Chinese Foreign Minister at the Asia-Europe meeting in Singapore this week and will have a full bilateral meeting with him on Friday.

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his advice about the meeting on Friday. Does he agree that one way to improve our already reasonable relationship with China would be to increase the number of Chinese students able to study in the United Kingdom? Will he therefore do his utmost to place on the agenda for Friday's talks an increase in the number of scholarships available to Chinese people? I am certain that that would do a great deal to improve our relations with the Chinese.

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. In 1995–96, Her Majesty's Government supported 450 students from China under various scholarship schemes. A new scheme for joint funding with the private sector got under way last year and a further similar scheme is being taken forward. An additional 192 Chinese scholars came to the United Kingdom in 1995–96 under the Overseas Development Administration's technical co-operation training programme. We shall continue to support scholarship and training programmes for Chinese students and to explore possible new initiatives within the limits of our resources.

I am afraid that the agenda on Friday will be very full. Because we already have a reasonably successful programme of students coming to the United Kingdom, I doubt that the issue will be on the agenda.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Minister understand that the Secretary of State will have support from both sides of the House later this week when he seeks to persuade the Chinese Government to respect the democratic reforms introduced by Governor Patten? Does he agree that the maintenance of the reforms should not be just a bilateral matter between the United Kingdom and China? What steps are the Government taking to mobilise the opinion of the international community to persuade the Chinese Government to respect the democratic reforms?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. and learned Gentleman is right to say that such important issues as the future of human rights and democracy in Hong Kong should not be matters only of bilateral relations. That is one reason why we were cheered by the international community's response to the decisions on the provisional legislature when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State summoned the Chinese ambassador on 20 December. When the Chinese decided to water down the Bill of Rights ordnance, the international community, particularly the United States, was very supportive. I know that the whole world is taking a keen interest in the matter.

Mr. Renton: Will the Foreign Secretary be discussing the steps that Britain intends to take after the handover to China to discharge its responsibilities under the 1984 joint agreement, particularly once the joint liaison group has ceased to exist in 2000? Is there not a case for establishing a special parliamentary committee to keep in touch with the high level of autonomy that Hong Kong is promised under the agreement?

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. Friend is right that it is important for the House to continue to exercise its scrutiny over the future administration of Hong Kong. He is also right to point out that we have obligations under the joint declaration. The joint liaison group will continue until 1 January 2000. We have an obligation for the next 50 years under the joint declaration to monitor the "one country, two systems" principle. The House will want to monitor the progress of Hong Kong. How it does that is a matter for the House to decide. We had a useful debate recently, and there is no doubt that the mood of hon. Members on both sides was that there should be proper scrutiny by the House. The exact form is yet to be determined.

Mr. Fatchett: May I associate the Labour party with the words of the right hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Renton) and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell)? We all agree that it is crucial that respect for human rights continues in Hong Kong after 1 July this year. We want to send the message again from the House to the Government of China that respect for human rights has been important in Hong Kong's way of life and economic success.

Will the Minister make it clear that, apart from the points that he has already made about marshalling international opinion, he will ensure that the Government

take the toughest possible line against the Chinese proposals to repeal the human rights legislation and go ahead with the provisional legislature? Will he make it clear what action the Government intend to take, and make it abundantly clear that everybody here expects China to honour its agreement after 1 July, and that there will be continuing respect for human rights in Hong Kong?

Mr. Hanley: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's co-operation in these matters and for the dialogue that we have established, which goes too for his right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the shadow Foreign Secretary, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary himself.

It is important that the House has basic agreements on matters of such importance as, for instance, the establishment of the provisional legislature and the Bill of Rights ordinance. My right hon. and learned Friend set out the Government's considered view on the provisional legislature on 20 December. There is no basis for China's plans in the joint declaration or the Basic Law.

We are greatly concerned about the proposals of the preparatory committee's legal sub-group for the Bill of Rights ordinance, which has largely been endorsed by the preparatory committee in plenary. That has done great damage to Hong Kong, as I discovered only a week ago, and will have done great damage to confidence in Hong Kong around the world. I made a formal protest to the Chinese ambassador on 22 January. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend is urging Qian Qichen, the Chinese Vice Premier and Foreign Minister, to think again.

Mr. David Howell: Further to the questions asked about Hong Kong, does not article 3 of the 1984 joint declaration specifically say that the laws and rights of the people of Hong Kong will continue after the handover? Are not the proposals of the provisional legislature flatly in breach of that treaty? What steps are we going to take when a treaty that we have signed in solemn good faith is so flagrantly breached?

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. Friend is right to say that, when such agreements are breached we should query them, and query them with great resolve. The key issues still cause great concern. I believe that we in the House have accepted the principle of the joint declaration of one country two systems, not one country two economic systems. The very stuff of human rights, the recipe that has gone on to make up Hong Kong, which is not purely economic and contains the most remarkable sparks, has created the miracle that needs to be preserved for its continued success. We shall continue to press the Chinese on what we believe are breaches of the joint declaration.

Iraq

5. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on peace negotiations in northern Iraq. [13958]

Mr. Hanley: Our objective in northern Iraq is peace and the well being of the people there. With the United States of America and Turkey we established and have consolidated a ceasefire between the Kurdish Democratic party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. We continue to be involved in discussions to help them resolve their differences and we are making encouraging progress.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister agree that part of any peace process must include bringing those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide to justice? Will he therefore add his support to the campaign "Indict" launched in the House of Commons with all-party support and the support of the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal Democrats to bring Saddam Hussein and his closest supporters in the current regime in Iraq before an international tribunal to answer for their crimes?

Mr. Hanley: I must pay tribute to the hon. Lady, because I believe that nobody in the House has studied the matter more assiduously or shown such great courage by visiting the area in northern Iraq where the Kurds are at the moment. I assure her that we share the objective of wanting those responsible for the appalling atrocities that she has described, especially Saddam Hussein, to be brought to justice. They deserve the widespread condemnation that they have received from the international community and the House. We are open to suggestions on how to bring those responsible to justice; it is not of course easy. We doubt that the process that led to the Yugoslavian tribunal can be duplicated for Iraq. The circumstances are different, not least because of the passage of time since the events in question.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that Saddam Hussein denies democracy to his people, and is the biggest threat to peace in the middle east, emphasises the need for the strongest possible sanctions against Iraq? Can my right hon. Friend guarantee that our European friends follow such a policy?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is right. The recent acceptance of United Nations Security Council resolution 986 will not mean the lifting of sanctions. It is a humanitarian gesture to allow the people of Iraq, with whom we have no argument, to be fed and to receive medical assistance. It is vital that the people of Iraq are fed, because they have been starved and deprived of medical assistance by Saddam Hussein for too long. There are no grounds for relaxing any of the sanctions, given Saddam Hussein's refusal to respect the relevant UN resolutions.

Economic and Monetary Union

6. **Mr. Kevin Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many civil servants in his Department are currently working on issues relating to economic and monetary union. [13959]

Mr. David Davis: No Foreign and Commonwealth Office official is assigned exclusively to EMU issues, which are dealt with alongside other EU policy matters. EMU bears on the responsibility of a number of FCO departments.

Mr. Hughes: That is a pity, because such officials might have warned the Foreign Secretary and his Minister about the problems. The chairman of Unilever warned

today that, if the Government did not sign up to the single currency, the company would reconsider its investment in this country. Given that Unilever employs some 21,000 people, should not the Foreign Secretary reconsider his comment on Radio 4 last week that we might stay out, even if the terms are right?

Mr. Davis: I do not know whether we need an official for that, but the hon. Gentleman needs a new research assistant. He has not noticed that this country has received maximum inward investment in the past decade, compared with the rest of the European Union. That investment has come here for a variety of reasons, and we are the number one destination for German overseas investment. That is true this year, as it was last year and the year before, and the investors know our policy on monetary union.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can officials and Ministers in the Foreign Office find time to read the admirable letter from Brian Reading in today's *Financial Times*, which suggests that there is little likelihood that the Federal Republic of Germany will ever, in the foreseeable future, achieve the proportion of national debt to gross national product that is required under the Maastricht treaty? Is it not clear from the recession and unemployment levels in Germany and elsewhere that economic and monetary union is not working?

Mr. Davis: I thank my hon. Friend for his recommendation. Similar analyses were the reason why my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said that it was unlikely—not impossible, but unlikely—that EMU could safely proceed in 1999. That is an issue that must be faced by all those who say that it can proceed. We do not have monetary union at the moment, but the other European countries have a different social model, which has led to the tragic circumstances—we cannot take any pleasure from them—of an increase of 500,000 in the German unemployment figures in a month and a total unemployment figure of 4.6 million. That is the result of a different approach to competitiveness, and I do not recommend that we follow it.

Mr. Robin Cook: Can the Minister confirm that two officials in the Foreign Office who are working on EMU are the special advisers to the Foreign Secretary? *The Sunday Telegraph* reported that those advisers had drawn up 12 different positions on the single currency, from which Tory Members could pick the policy of their choice.

Are there any other examples of ministerial advisers helping Back Benchers to express their opposition to departmental policy, rather than their support?

Did the Minister hear the chairman of the 1922 Committee state to the world that he had been assured by the Prime Minister that Tory Members of Parliament are free to pick the policy of their choice on the single currency for their election addresses? Does he not recognise that a party that has abandoned any attempt to require its members to support the Government is a party that has lost the right to continue in government?

Mr. Davis: I could make a couple of points if the right hon. Gentleman wants to talk about election addresses. I recommend that he addresses his question to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who pointed out that scores of Labour Members would take their own view on monetary union.

It is amazing, brazen cheek for Labour to take this line. The most famous election address in history is that of the Leader of the Labour party in 1983, in which he undertook to leave the European Union, to abandon the nuclear deterrent and to continue nationalisation—all issues that Labour would be embarrassed to take on today.

Ten days ago, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said on television:

"if it goes ahead and if it succeeds, in other words if it is stable then you cannot stay out".

That is Labour's view on monetary union, and, in the unfortunate event of there being a Labour Government, that is exactly what would happen. Every Labour Government have presided over increases in unemployment, expenditure and inflation and reductions in the value of sterling, so they could not stay out.

Kenya

7. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom and Kenya. [13960]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have long-standing and deep-rooted links with Kenya, which is one of our most significant partners in Africa. The bilateral relationship spans wide-ranging areas of activity, many of which are outside the framework of Government contacts. We maintain a close dialogue with the Kenyan authorities on a wide range of issues.

Mr. Butler: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the development of the East African Community involving Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda? What efforts is the Foreign Office making to ensure that that operation is a success?

Dr. Fox: Yes, it is a rare delight to give the House good news about east Africa. We are convinced that the revival of the EAC signals a fundamental shift towards a closer relationship between the three countries. That is an essential step towards creating mutual confidence, which I believe will improve the political situation no end in east Africa. Under our development division in east Africa, the Overseas Development Administration has agreed to assist the EAC secretariat to develop new management systems—to which it attaches a high priority—through the provision of technical assistance.

Land Mines

8. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the changes in Government policy in respect of land mines in the past two years. [13961]

Mr. David Davis: Last April, I announced our support for a total global ban on anti-personnel land mines as soon as possible, severe restrictions on the use of anti-personnel land mines by our armed forces, the destruction of nearly

half our existing stocks and the extension of our export moratorium to prohibit the export of all anti-personnel land mines to all countries.

Mr. Cohen: Would the Government like to be popular just before the election? Have they seen the opinion poll that showed that 90 per cent. of those questioned agreed with Princess Diana that there should be a worldwide ban on the construction and use of anti-personnel land mines? Instead of being a loose cannon on this issue, and following delaying and diversionary tactics in Geneva, why do the Government not give unequivocal support to the Ottawa process to get a ban on these hideous weapons?

Mr. Davis: It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman wrote his supplementary question before he had heard my reply, in which I said that the Government's policy is to pursue a global ban on anti-personnel land mines. I can give him an impartial view of the matter. When Princess Diana was in Angola and this subject was on all the front pages, the gentleman leading the delegation, Mr. Mike Whitlam—the head of the British Red Cross—told the "Today" programme:

> "I read the statement put out by the British Government last year . . . headlined 'Working towards a global ban on anti-personnel landmines' and at the time they brought in a number of measures which move the whole scenario further towards that end. So we were delighted when the British Government took those steps last year and certainly I am not aware that we were out of step".

I agree with him.

The hon. Gentleman made a serious point about the Ottawa process. We take the view, as do the United Nations Secretary-General and others, that the conference on disarmament is the best place in which to progress it. If we find that the process allows us to achieve more progress with the countries of concern—the producers and exporters of large quantities of land mines, or those who use them irresponsibly—we will support it.

Mr. Wigley: I welcome the progress that the Government have made, and urge the Minister to go the rest of the way and do away with all stocks of land mines held by the United Kingdom. Does he agree that it was totally inappropriate for anyone to describe Princess Diana's involvement as that of a loose cannon? We would be better off having more loose cannons firing humanitarian salvoes than more loose land mines blowing off children's legs.

Mr. Davis: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's long-term interest in the subject; indeed, when I announced our policy last year it was in response to a question from him. The noble Lord involved said that he did not recognise the words attributed to him in the press, and I have every reason to believe him.

Although, to take up what the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said, there is no political advantage in it, I was pleased to see all the coverage, because we have to recognise the fact that 20,000 lives are shattered or destroyed every year. We are trying to alleviate that problem.

I will reflect the question about our land mine use back to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). As he is aware, as the recipient of my answer, we will allow the use of anti-personnel land mines only by ministerial instruction, and only if it is absolutely necessary. We have to address the problem of how to change the policy of the countries that export, produce or misuse those land mines.

Last year, for example, we managed to get China to agree not to export undetectable land mines—the worst sort, because once in place they cannot be removed. That is the line that we are taking: the one that will give the best progress. To that end, the hon. Member for Caernarfon should know, as he is an honourable and honest man, that this country has been at the forefront of those that are acting to remove land mines from the countries most afflicted by them, and has spent £22 million on it to date.

Mr. Key: I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's remarks, and I commend the Government on their policy, which is right both in seeking to establish international action and in supporting practical measures on the ground for the removal of mines. May I suggest, however, that £22 million over five years in humanitarian aid to the agencies removing those mines is not enough and that it would be very well received if my hon. Friend agreed to double that amount? If he would like suggestions as to where the aid programme could be adjusted, I would be delighted to make some.

Mr. Davis: The Chancellor might have a word with me if I gave a commitment straight away, but I make two points to my hon. Friend. First, our land mine aid has accelerated rapidly in recent years, so to look at it over five years is slightly misleading; and, secondly, it is demand led: the more projects come up, the more we can consider doing. I spoke only last week to Mike Whitlam, the director of the British Red Cross, about that exact point.

Cyprus

9. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps he has taken to help to achieve a settlement of the Cyprus problem. [13962]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier.

Mr. Corbett: I welcome the present Foreign Secretary's visit to Cyprus, and that of the next Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). Have the Government received reports of what in my recollection was a unique get-together of leaders of political parties from both Cypriot communities that took place recently in the former Ledra Palace hotel on the green line and, if so, what does the Minister make of it? Will he give the House a commitment that he will do all that he can to encourage contacts between politicians, teachers, doctors, lawyers, trade unionists, business people and others from both communities to try to change the climate in favour of a settlement of the Cyprus problem?

Mr. Davis: As I have said, we will do everything we can to promote any method of improving the situation and of devising a solution to the Cyprus problem. Of course,

I will do everything possible along those lines. I hope, however, that the hon. Gentleman's assessment of Cyprus is more accurate than his domestic political forecasts.

Mr. Trimble: I agree with the Minister's earlier comment that the accession of Cyprus to the European Community would benefit the whole island. I hope that that is the basis on which accession takes place. Does he agree that matters would be improved immediately if the European Community stopped discriminating against northern Cyprus in trade matters? That creates the unfortunate impression that the Community is being manipulated in favour of one community in Cyprus, and that should end.

Mr. Davis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. The problem is that what he terms discrimination arose from a court judgment, not from pressure of the sort that he describes. As such, there is little that can be done directly about it, but other measures can be designed to help.

Gibraltar

10. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had about the future of Gibraltar. [13963]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary regularly meets the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to discuss matters concerning Gibraltar's future. The last such meeting was in London on 18 November. He also met the Spanish Foreign Minister in Madrid on 22 January under the Brussels process to explore the scope for enhanced co-operation between Gibraltar and Spain.

Mr. Evans: I thank the Minister for that reply. Would he take this opportunity to assure the British people and the Gibraltarians that while we have a Conservative Government the Union Jack will continue to fly over Gibraltar and that we will not raise the white flag? Does he also agree that, if that lot over there ever got into power, they would give away Scotland, Wales, the sovereign and this Parliament to the bureaucrats in Brussels and it would not be long before they gave away the rock and its monkeys to Spain, but it takes a monkey to recognise one?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend puts his point much better than I ever could. With respect to his substantive question on the sovereignty of Gibraltar, we gave an undertaking in the 1969 constitution—which this Government will always stand by—that we will never give up the sovereignty of Gibraltar without the free and fully given consent of the Gibraltarian people. We will always stand by that undertaking.

Mr. Mackinlay: I support the Minister on the principles of national self-determination for the people of Gibraltar, but may we also consider their democratic deficit? They are citizens of the European Union, but they have no representation in the European Parliament or in this place. Is there not a case for the people of Gibraltar having at least some limited representation here, as occurs with comparable territories of the United States and France?

Mr. Davis: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's commitment to Gibraltar and to its people. The question about the European Parliament is not easy to answer because, with 30,000 people, Gibraltar is less than one tenth the size of a British constituency. With respect to his other proposal, I do not think that there is much to be advanced by this country's copying the constitutions of France or the United States.

Yemen

11. **Sir Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Foreign Minister of Yemen to discuss Anglo–Yemeni relations; and if he will make a statement. [13964]

Mr. Hanley: During his visit to Yemen in November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State discussed a wide range of bilateral issues with Dr Iryani, including how further to improve political and commercial co-operation between the United Kingdom and Yemen. No further meeting is planned in the near future.

Sir Robert Hicks: Given the nodal position occupied by Yemen and its potential for development, should not the United Kingdom Government be showing more interest in, and giving greater encouragement to, the numerous Yemeni political development and economic programmes? In particular, would not the exciting Aden port redevelopment and free port project be a worthwhile starter?

Mr. Hanley: I agree with my hon. Friend, who I know has visited Yemen quite recently. We are determined to enhance relations with our Yemeni friends, as we have made clear during a succession of recent visits. Not only has the Secretary of State made a rare visit to the Yemen, but so has the Minister for Trade. I visited it a year before the Secretary of State, and the permanent under-secretary at the FCO has visited it in the past couple of weeks. The other way round, the Prime Minister of Yemen, Abd al-Ghani, visited Britain last September and Dr. Iryani has been here recently. We have invited President Saleh to visit at a date yet to be specified this year. My hon. Friend is right that the Aden port project is exciting and offers big opportunities to British companies. I am pleased that British Airways has recently agreed to renew its air services to Yemen.

Mr. Dalyell: Did Dr. Iryani raise the long-standing Yemeni concern about the appalling plight of the children of Iraq and the famine and its consequences? Is it altogether wise to be so definite about sanctions that strengthen, not weaken, Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Hanley: I admit that I discussed the situation in Iraq with Dr. Iryani. I am pleased that, when I met President Saleh, he too expressed regrets about the policy of Saddam Hussein and the way in which the people of

Iraq have been harmed by it. We are having a good exchange of views with Yemen, and I believe that it understands our point of view well.

Mrs. Sherratt

12. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by his Department to the Moroccan Government concerning the case of Mrs. Sherratt. [13965]

Dr. Liam Fox: We stand ready to make representations to the Moroccan authorities on behalf of Mrs. Sherratt once we know the outcome of her solicitors' bid to obtain compensation through the courts.

Mr. Day: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. He knows that this case is particularly tragic. My constituent was shot by an off-duty Moroccan policeman and is wheelchair-bound and paralysed for the rest of her life. The Moroccan Government deny responsibility, despite the fact that the weapon used was supplied by them. Since I raised this matter at business questions, the Moroccan ambassador has kindly agreed to meet me, for which I am grateful. Legal action may be taken.

I ask my hon. Friend to bear in mind the fact that the matter is serious because of the number of British tourists who holiday in Morocco. They must be assured that the Government will look after their interests. Should legal action not be successful—and hopes of success are tenuous—can the matter be raised at ministerial level, if necessary?

Dr. Fox: The shooting in the Hotel Tarik was indeed tragic, and two Britons were killed. The gunman's wife was shot, and the gunman committed suicide. Given the circumstances, we believe that this was an isolated incident, not a trend. The problem with compensation is that Morocco does not have an equivalent of our criminal injury compensation scheme. I assure my hon. Friend that, if Mrs. Sherratt cannot obtain satisfaction through the courts, we will consider approaching the Moroccan authorities in the way he suggests.

Racism and Xenophobia

13. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the European Union initiative against racism and xenophobia. [13966]

Mr. David Davis: There are two main areas of the initiative: the designation of 1997 as the European Year Against Racism and the EU monitoring centre on racism and xenophobia.

Mr. Gapes: Does the Minister agree that racist and neo-Nazi groups operate internationally, often publishing their material in one country and disseminating it in others? Does he agree that it would be better to have a co-ordinated, legally based, European-wide joint initiative for minimum standards of racial equality? Is it not deplorable that our Government are in a minority of 14 to one in blocking the initiative to establish a European Union centre to monitor racism, and are opposing EU-wide action against holocaust denial?

Mr. Davis: I believe that, some time ago, the Home Secretary said something about dealing with the issue of material being published in one country and printed in another. Europe has a role in dealing with racism: that of exchanging and disseminating information on how to deal with racism and xenophobia. However, the United Kingdom's domestic race relations legislation is among the most sophisticated in Europe.

If the hon. Gentleman wants effective race relations legislation, the best locus for that is within the nation state, not in a supranational body. That is how the misunderstanding from which he clearly suffers has arisen. We are not blocking progress on the establishment of the observatory; but we are saying that it is appropriate as an intergovernmental measure, not as a measure for the Commission and the European Court in the European Community.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the European Union might make more progress in the fight against xenophobia and racism within the European Union if, instead of setting up institutions to enforce codes of Euro-political correctness, it looked at the competitiveness of the European economy and did something about the rampant unemployment on the continent—the sort of unemployment that would be caused by the policies of the Labour party and lead to the very racism and xenophobia—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is abusing my recognition of him on this question, which relates not to the economy but to a specific issue. Would the Minister like to make some response?

Mr. Davis: My simple response is that when unemployment is maximised it creates an obvious problem by encouraging racism and extremism of all sorts. Britain and other European countries would seek to avoid that.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister condemn the incidents of racism and xenophobia that have been witnessed by NATO peacekeepers in the city of Mostar in recent days? Will he tell the Croatian authorities that there can be no question of progress towards— [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not in Europe".] There can be no question of progress towards Croatian membership of European or other institutions as long as—

Madam Speaker: Order. I call Sir David Knox—let us have a sensible question.

European Union

16. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about Britain's relations with the other countries in the European Union. [13969]

Mr. David Davis: Britain enjoys very good relations with all other member states of the European Union.

Sir David Knox: Does my right hon. Friend believe that relations with other European Union countries would

be improved if their foreign Ministers came to this country to explain, over the heads of the Government, their view of the future of the European Union?

Mr. Davis: It strikes me that that has already happened. A little while ago, the German Foreign Secretary commented about a British election occurring at some point. However, if one accepts that a European Union exists, there are issues that are important to all the peoples of Europe. The British Government note in our policies that many of the people of Europe support the sorts of things that we stand for—sometimes more than their Governments do. We saw that when the Foreign Secretary went to Stockholm and received an enormously good reception for repeating the ideas that he has expressed from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What are the consequences of an ever-revaluing pound for our commercial relationships with other European Union companies?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman asks a somewhat hypothetical question. It is easier to answer the question: what are the causes of an ever-revaluing pound? The answer is enormous economic success in this country.

Mr. Dykes: Is it not worth recalling that, when Klaus Kinkel commented on British politics at Christmas, he was told to mind his own business, but that we then immediately said that we would construct the convergence criteria statistics for all the other countries and tell them what to do with their own figures? Would it not be a good idea to follow the excellent advice of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox)? If foreign statesmen and politicians came over here, they would be able to convey to the long-suffering British public—who, all too often, sad to say, are not given the truth about Europe by governmental sources—their enthusiasm for the new projects, including the plan for at least 10 countries to join economic and monetary union when the time comes.

Mr. Davis: I have not witnessed a reticence on the part of, for example, Jacques Santer in commenting on matters that have relevance in the UK. We have a view—a very distinctive view—on what will make a successful Europe, and that is the point of view that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has been communicating, and will continue to communicate, to the people of Europe.

Ms Quin: In view of the criticisms that Jacques Santer has recently addressed to the Government, would the Government continue to describe his appointment as a triumph of British diplomacy?

Mr. Davis: I think that the President of the Commission does a very good job, but his view of Europe is not the same as ours. That is not new: it is not surprising in a man who was the Prime Minister of Luxembourg. His federalist view is shared by several of the leaders of Europe. We must deal with and argue about that, and be determined to win the argument.

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of the House on standing firm on UK borders and therefore getting our own way on this subject? Is there not a moral in this: if you stand firm, your will has its own way?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend is, of course, exactly right. Standing firm is a necessary part of negotiation, as is standing up for the rights of this country. It is very different from what either of the Opposition parties would do. They stand for nothing, and, as I have said before, those who stand for nothing will fall for anything.

Burma

17. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the steps taken by the Government to promote respect for human rights in Burma. [13970]

Mr. Hanley: We have taken action bilaterally—at the UN and with our EU partners—to put pressure on the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council to implement democratic reform and full respect for human rights in Burma.

Mr. Ainsworth: On 15 January 1997, the Minister told the House that he was urging the ambassador of Burma to open dialogue with pro-democracy forces. He also told us that he was following the European line regarding relations with Burma. Since then, clear evidence has emerged that the position has deteriorated. In the light of that and of our past relationship with that country, why are we simply following the European line and not taking a lead?

Mr. Hanley: I do not agree that we are merely following others. We are helping to develop the UN General Assembly resolution and we were at the forefront of developing the EU common position, which the hon. Gentleman feels is not effective. The EU common position that was recently adopted, which imposes a ban on entry visas for senior members of SLORC and senior military and security force officials and on high-level bilateral visits to Burma, the suspension of non-humanitarian official aid, which has been enforced for some nine years, the arms embargo in 1991 and the cutting of all remaining defence links in 1992 are pretty strong reactions. We continue to use the services of our excellent ambassador in Rangoon, Robert Gordon, to make our presence felt directly, not only to the ruling regime but in discussion with Aung San Suu Kyi.

Middle East Peace Process

18. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the middle east peace process. [13971]

19. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government regarding the implementation of the Oslo agreement; and if he will make a statement. [13972]

Mr. Hanley: I welcome the reopening, after last month's Hebron agreement, of Israeli-Palestinian

negotiations on a range of outstanding issues. We will continue to urge both sides to move swiftly to implement existing agreements, and to restart the final status negotiations.

Mr. Ross: I am sure that the whole House would like to welcome unreservedly the freeing of the 31 Palestinian female prisoners from Israeli gaols. The Minister will be aware that there are still about 2,000 male Palestinian prisoners in Israeli gaols. Does he agree that, the more that Prime Minister Netanyahu is exposed directly to the peace process, the more likely it is that the peace process will move forward?

Mr. Hanley: We welcome the release of prisoners last night. That was as stipulated in the interim agreement, proper implementation of which is crucial. Further redeployments must be substantial if Palestinian faith in the peace process is to be maintained, and we must move swiftly on the other outstanding issues. I shall keep my comments to a minimum because of time constraints.

Mr. McAvoy: Will the Minister confirm the Government's stance that the best guarantee of secure borders for Israel is co-existence with the Palestinian entity or state? Bearing that in mind, will he continue to press the Israeli Government and the Palestine Authority to continue the Oslo process as the only way to guarantee peace in the middle east?

Mr. Hanley: I thoroughly agree that continuation of the middle east peace process is the only way forward. The United Kingdom supports self-determination for the Palestinians in United Nations resolutions. The final status of a Palestinian entity is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, a matter for negotiation between the parties, but we believe strongly that it would be unwise to rule out statehood as an option.

Mr. Batiste: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the development of trade is an important ingredient in the peace process? When will the United Kingdom ratify the EU-Israel trade agreement?

Mr. Hanley: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Improved trade for Israel is vital not only for the people of Israel, but for Palestinians. I hope that in the House next week we can make progress on the EU-Israel agreement.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is not considerable credit due to Prime Minister Netanyahu for the substantial progress that has been made recently with the middle east peace process? Should we not always bear in mind the fact that his Government have a responsibility to the people of Israel to be mindful of their incredible vulnerability, because of the size of the country?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is correct: the Prime Minister of Israel is committed to the peace process. We must do everything that we can to encourage further progress, following the Hebron agreement. There was a serious delay over the Hebron agreement, but it has now been passed, and we must make progress. All parties believe in peace.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South–West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be well aware of the convention in the House that, when new Members make their maiden speech, it is customary to hear those speeches in silence. Perhaps a similar convention could be observed for the large number of Members who wish to make their valedictory speeches before their retirement. Many of our colleagues are at that interesting age, poised on the cusp between the recent arrival of wisdom and the future onset of senile dementia, and may therefore have a number of things to get off their chest under the privilege of silence. If you could rule that such a convention be observed, I am sure that it would benefit the collective wisdom of the House.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. [HON. MEMBERS: "Senile dementia."] A long time ahead yet. May I assure you, Madam Speaker, that most of us in the House who believe in speech-making and interruptions will not accept silence in our valedictory speeches. The more we are heckled and interrupted, the more the House and the Members will enjoy it.

Madam Speaker: May I respond to the original point of order. If I could distinguish between the voluntary and the involuntary valedictory speeches, I might go along with the suggestion.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the rather personal nature of Question 21, involving Mr. Perry Miller and Mr. John Kennedy and the book "Sleaze", has the Foreign Secretary made any request that his Ministers should answer the question, in order to clarify the rather difficult statements that are made in the book?

Madam Speaker: I fear that the hon. Gentleman is trying to extend Foreign Office Questions. I noticed the question that he had tabled on the matter, but I have not been informed that the Foreign Secretary has given any instructions about answering the question, unless of course it had been reached today, as I hoped that it might have been.

While I am on my feet, may I say that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is extremely good at handling questions. We tend to deal with a lot of its questions—more than any other Department. Had it been a little faster today, Mr. Dalyell's question would have been answered.

Political Fundraising

3.34 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision in respect of the funding of political parties at general elections and other times.

The Bill proposes to regulate the method of political funding. The present system is most unsatisfactory, and reform is urgently needed.

I should like to see four changes made. First, I want an appropriate authority, be it the Committee on Standards in Public Life, chaired by Lord Nolan, or a new body, to be responsible for looking into how political parties raise funds, and for political parties to submit financial reports annually to such a body.

When Lord Nolan's committee was set up, Opposition Members, both Back-Bench and Front-Bench, wanted it to look into party finances. We remain dissatisfied with how the Tory party collects its funds, and the Tory party says that it is not happy with how we collect ours. That is a strong argument in favour of Lord Nolan's committee looking into the matter.

The Prime Minister, however, was adamant and said that under no circumstances would the matter be referred to the Nolan committee. I can only conclude that the Conservative party has much to hide when it comes to how it collects its money. I do not believe that the Tory-dominated Home Affairs Select Committee is the best body to look into the issue of party financing. An outside body, certainly not made up of parliamentarians, would be far better. I hope that that reform will be carried out.

The second reform I want is that all those who donate more than a certain amount to a political party should be identified. Some say that there should be secrecy in those matters, but I cannot see the argument for that. It may be argued, for what it is worth, that those who donate small sums should not be identified, but there is every reason to identify those who donate thousands of pounds and more. If I were asked what limit I would place on identification, I would say that the source of any sum above £5,000 donated to a political party should be identified accordingly.

Tory Members have recently made a great deal of fuss about the Leader of the Opposition's funding—*[Interruption.]* I see that they are responding as one would expect. They say that they are unhappy about it. I understand that Sir Gordon Downey has approved the method by which the Leader of the Opposition's office has collected funds, and it is in the Register of Members' Interests. If Tory Members are not satisfied about how the Labour party is funded, that is all the more reason for approving these reforms. We should let the whole matter go before the Nolan committee or a new body.

The third change I propose is that all overseas donations to political parties should be banned, with one exception. If an individual living abroad is a full United Kingdom citizen who has the right to vote in this country and has lived here for most of his or her life, it would be wrong to take away that individual's right to donate money. In the past few years, Hong Kong billionaires have been helping to finance the Tory party, and that scandal must come to an end.

[Mr. David Winnick]

There is a further change that I want to see. For more than 100 years, the amount that could be spent on behalf of a parliamentary candidate—indeed, a local government candidate for that matter—has been limited. The sleaze that occurred more than a century ago was tackled. There is no longer any controversy over the matter. All parties in the House agree that it would be wrong to try to buy votes in one's constituency, and that there should be a limit on the amount that is spent on our behalf. That sum is updated in line with inflation. I have not heard any controversy in the House about that issue. There is an Order in Council following discussions between the political parties.

If that is right, and obviously it is, what sense is there in having a situation whereby nationally a party can spend as much as it likes? It is a contradiction to the limit on candidates in our constituencies. I believe that a change is required.

These are all modest, long-overdue reforms. There are those, however, on the Government Benches who believe in secrecy. For example, the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), who is in his place at the moment, was quoted in *The Times* in June 1993 as saying:

"I think the Party"—

his party, of course—

"is too open about its affairs as things are. I don't want more openness".

Those are the hon. Gentleman's views.

Lord McAlpine has some experience in Tory party financing. He should do, because he was its treasurer for some 15 years. He said that when he was treasurer he believed in secrecy, that it was right and proper that no information other than what the party wanted to disclose should be given. He has changed his mind—he has changed his party. He now argues that the time has come to end such secrecy. He also said—I do not know whether his tongue was in his cheek—that it would help the Conservative party if it was more open.

Many people in the Tory party—perhaps not on the Tory Benches, but reformists, such as Eric Chalker and the rest—have long argued that there should be more democracy, more openness, more detailed financial accounts in their party. I hope that, if they hear about my modest Bill, they will support it.

I mentioned Hong Kong billionaires. It is said that they have given more than £11 million in the past few years to the Tory party.

Then there is Asil Nadir. Of all the money that he contributed to the Tory party, nearly £500,000 was stolen money. The Home Secretary is in his place. He says at every opportunity that he believes in law and order.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Winnick: He nods his head in agreement. But one aspect of law and order is to see that his party returns stolen money. I believe that the Home Secretary and the Attorney-General have a duty, a responsibility in government, to see to it that that is so. Unless the Home Secretary does so, it is total hypocrisy on the part of Ministers.

It is said that the Tory party is not concerned with people who seek honours. Sixty-five per cent. of honours to industry under Lady Thatcher, and 68 per cent. under the present Prime Minister, went to those who contributed to Tory party funds. That may be pure coincidence. On the other hand, those who are more cynical will take the view that honours were given to those people because they contributed substantial sums to the Tory party. If Lord Nolan's committee or an appropriate body did the job that I propose in my Bill, it would investigate that, just as it would investigate any aspect of Labour party matters about which the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) would be concerned.

I accept, because I am a realist, that my Bill will not become law in a Tory-dominated House of Commons, but I hope that when a Labour Government are elected later this year, one of the first reforms that we will introduce will be on party financing. The reforms and changes that my hon. Friends and I want to see will, I am sure, be very much on the agenda of that Labour Government. I want to see change and reform to undermine the sleaze, and the furtive, underhand way in which the Conservative party collects its money.

3.44 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): There are three reasons for opposing the Bill: Labour hypocrisy, Labour hypocrisy and Labour hypocrisy. The Bill is mischievous. Before the last election, we heard cant and rubbish from Opposition Members about the Conservative party being financed from Saudi Arabia. They named a Saudi prince, but immediately the election was out of the way the truth came out. They had to withdraw the accusation, libel damages were paid to the prince and it was shown to be yet another Labour lie about Conservative party funding.

The Bill does not disclose what Labour is up to with its own financing. Nowhere in the Bill is there any information about how the Labour party accounts for its trade union moneys, which are still its primary source of finance. I have been through the Labour party accounts—I have them here—and I defy anyone to discover how much the trade unions give the Labour party in total. The accounts are misleading, and cover up the true position.

Labour is still heavily dependent on the trade unions: it is tied to them. It has changed the arrangements, and now has what it calls a constituency plan agreement, the wording of which I have managed to find out. Under such agreements, the constituency Labour party and the union undertake to recognise

"the value of the organisational links, between the Labour Party and its affiliated trade unions".

Under those agreements, the constituency Labour party and the trade unions are committed

"to co-operating, with the union at appropriate levels, in line with the union's rules".

Under the new arrangements, the Labour party is absolutely committed at national and local level to working with the trade unions. Trade unions still make donations to the Labour party. They still make tied donations: donations tied to performance. The Labour party still has to deliver to the trade unions.

We have confirmation that donations to the Conservative party are not tied. We have no less an authority than Mohammed Al Fayed himself, who complained that he got absolutely nothing from the

Conservative party for his £0.25 million. Those who donate to the Labour party actually get something, and there are secret joint committees of the Labour party and the trade unions.

The Labour party is in a serious mess. Its funding is still in difficulty. In its accounts and public statements, it claims to have 400,000 members, but when it came to telephoning its membership, it could reach only 200,000—the other 200,000 were missing. The problem was that the unions have not purchased enough membership cards.

The Labour party goes in for secret funds. The amount of its funds which is interesting is not what is published in the accounts: it is what is in the secret or blind funds. I have identified at least six blind funds, and possibly a seventh. There is the Leader of the Opposition's personal blind fund; the deputy leader of the Labour party's personal blind fund; the shadow Chancellor's personal blind fund; the industrial research trust; the Westminster objectors trust; the Front Bench research fund; and the seventh fund that I have identified, apparently involving the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), is the Labour party's Soho fund. I shall not say anything more about the hon. Gentleman and his connections with Soho.

Let us look at the Labour leader's blind fund. In a statement to the 1996 Labour party conference, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"we will legislate to make the Tories tell us where their money comes from."

He did not say that he would legislate to make himself declare where his own money came from. Where does his money come from? Is it a blind fund set up by lawyers to evade the rules of Parliament? The answer is that it has certainly been set up to evade the rules of Parliament, but what it has not succeeded in doing is being blind, because the newspapers have already told us who donates. Indeed, the leader of the Labour party plays tennis with those who donate. "Anyone for tennis?" takes on a new meaning—"Anyone to donate to the Labour leader's fund?"

The Labour leader meets those who donate over lunch at Mr. Levy's house in north London. He knows who is donating to his Labour leader's private fund; there is no secrecy there. That is what Sir Gordon Downey was not told. Those who read Lord Rees's letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, and Lord Richard's statement in column 1712 of the House of Lords *Official Report*, will find that no mention was made of what happened at Mr. Levy's house, or of the Labour leader's meeting with the donors, in the information that was given to Sir Gordon Downey. It would seem that Sir Gordon was seriously misled by the Labour leader's office—and, by implication, by the Labour leader himself—in that those concerned were not open and honest in the information they gave him.

The fact is that the Prime Minister does not have a similar secret fund. He does not need to have blind funds of a personal nature. The Bill is hypocritical in the extreme. I understand from *The Times* that the Labour leader's blind fund has been used to pay personal expenses. According to that newspaper—and it has not been denied—it is not used just to pay the Opposition Leader's office expenses.

Some Opposition Members may ask what is wrong with blind funds. Quite simply, they do not work. The donors rarely remain silent; sooner or later, they seek recognition for their donations—and, as we know, in the Labour party recognition means favours, and getting something back.

The fact is that the Labour leader's blind fund is not just an onshore fund, as has been suggested. Mr. Levy's business connections extend to Switzerland and Guernsey, areas that are not known for ensuring that British income tax is paid at the level at which it might be. That is unattractive, and the Labour leader should clean up his act. We do not need ten-minute Bills; we need honesty and openness from the Labour leader and his office.

The fund has been shrouded in secrecy. That secrecy has partly failed, and is causing serious problems. It is disgraceful that it appears that Sir Gordon Downey may have been misled into giving some indication of approval, when he had not been given all the information about how the fund operated and who the Labour leader met at the tennis and lunch sessions at Mr. Levy's home.

This is very unsatisfactory. The newspapers have made clear how unsatisfactory it is. The fact is that a number of donors have already admitted that they donate to the fund; the fact is that there are overseas connections; the fact is that there have been soundbite cover-ups and a lack of openness from the Labour party. The existence of the fund was first disclosed at the end of November and the beginning of December, yet there has been no honesty or openness from Labour. Come out with the names of all the donors. Admit it. Let the Labour leader live up to the speech that he delivered to the party conference in front of all those journalists, the British public and the Labour party. Stop the secrecy in the Labour party. It is a disgrace, and Labour should be ashamed of it. I oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Winnick, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mr. John Spellar, Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. Robert Hughes, Mr. Doug Hoyle, Mr. Michael Clapham, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. Ken Eastham, Mr. Andrew Mackinlay and Mrs. Anne Campbell.

Mr. Winnick: Virtually everyone wanted to be on the list of supporters, Madam Speaker, but I had to make priorities. I hope that my other hon. Friends will excuse me.

Political Fundraising

Mr. Winnick accordingly presented a Bill to make provision in respect of the funding of political parties at general elections and other times: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 1 May, and to be printed [Bill 105].

Police Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

3.55 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill, in common with all the other measures that I have introduced in the past four years, has one simple but important purpose: to protect the public. It will help the police, together with other law enforcement agencies, to target serious and organised crime even more effectively. It will improve access to criminal records to protect the most vulnerable people in our society, particularly by subjecting anyone who wishes to work with children or who seeks other positions of trust, to a thorough check of criminal record information. The Bill will be of real practical benefit to the police, to other law enforcement agencies and to law-abiding citizens.

Organised crime is nothing new, but it is more sophisticated than ever before. Organised criminals are quick to exploit the opportunities provided by the ease of modern travel and modern communications. They operate across police force boundaries and national boundaries. They use the latest technology. They create large and complex businesses, part legal and part illegal, to launder the proceeds of their crimes. The Government are determined to ensure that the law enforcement agencies have the tools that they need to fight such crime effectively. They must be able to conduct effective surveillance, to obtain reliable intelligence and to target major crime in a co-ordinated way. The Bill will help them to achieve that.

Parts I and II provide for the creation of two national services: the NCIS Service Authority and the National Crime Squad. The arrangements for both services will be firmly rooted in our structure of local policing, with its tripartite system of sharing accountability between local representatives, chief officers of police and central Government. We are not proposing the creation of a national police service or the British equivalent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. There will be no "federal crimes" over which the new organisations will have exclusive jurisdiction. The public will continue to report all crimes to their local police forces. Police officers in both bodies will continue to be seconded or recruited from local police forces, and there will be strong local representation on the two new service authorities responsible for maintaining the two services. That approach strikes the right balance between putting in place effective national arrangements to meet the challenge of organised crime and preserving the local policing system that we all value so highly.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Clause 2(2)(a) refers to the right of the NCIS

"to gather, store and analyse information."

Would that include information gathered as a by-product of bugging for other purposes? Suppose the police had authority to bug someone and then discovered that the solicitor involved was gay, had HIV or was engaged in some particular activity that was not criminal, would that go on the police computer?

Mr. Howard: I cannot imagine that any information of the sort that the right hon. Gentleman identifies would be relevant to the investigation, prevention or detection of serious crime. On that basis, it would not be relevant to the activities of the National Criminal Intelligence Service. NCIS is interested in providing intelligence that is relevant to combating serious crime, and that is the basis on which it will proceed.

The Bill puts NCIS on an independent statutory footing. NCIS will continue to provide criminal intelligence to police forces across the United Kingdom and to other law enforcement agencies—principally Customs and Excise and the National Crime Squad—in this country and abroad. Last year, intelligence from NCIS contributed to the arrest of 1,378 major criminals, seizures of drugs worth £294 million and recovery of property worth £18 million. Its new status under the direction and control of a director general with chief constable rank will mean that it is even better placed to collect and develop intelligence for the benefit of all its users.

The National Crime Squad will bring together the existing regional crime squads into a single unit, again under the direction and control of a director-general with chief constable rank. Under current voluntary arrangements, the national co-ordinator of the regional crime squads has no powers of direction or control. The new squad will make it very much easier to deploy resources more flexibly and to tackle major criminals operating in one or more police force areas in England and Wales. The squad will continue to be able to support forces at the request of chief officers and will maintain close links with the Scottish crime squad and Royal Ulster Constabulary.

The Bill proposes that the two new national services should each be maintained by a new service authority. Those service authorities will be closely modelled on police authorities, but with some changes to reflect the national focus of the two services. The authorities will comprise independent members, one of whom will be appointed by the Secretary of State to chair both authorities, as well as police authority and police service representatives. The service authority for the National Crime Squad would have 17 members—comprising independent, police authority and police service members, plus one representative of the Secretary of State. The membership of the NCIS authority would be similar, but because of its United Kingdom-wide and multi-agency remit it would have a total membership of 19, which would also include representatives of police authorities and police forces in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland, and a representative of Customs and Excise.

Although they are separate, it is important that the two services should work closely together to achieve shared national objectives. For that reason, the Bill proposes that 10 members should serve on both authorities. The 10 joint members would include the three independent members to be appointed by the Secretary of State, one of whom would be the chairman of both authorities.

A strong local element has been preserved in those arrangements. Crown servants representing the Secretaries of State will have no voting powers. Representatives of

police authorities—including those for the Metropolitan police district, Scotland and Northern Ireland—will always make up a clear majority of those eligible to vote on the levy and the appointment of a director general. Conversely, it is right that there should be a strong national role, reflecting the interests of all parties, in those national services. We believe that we have struck the right balance, consistent with our current system of policing.

The majority of the income for the two services will be derived from levies on police authorities in England and Wales. In the case of NCIS, direct contributions will be made by other users. We believe that decisions on the levy should be strongly influenced by locally elected members of the service authorities. That is why we propose that only the police authority members from England and Wales—who will always be in a majority—and the independent members of the service authorities will vote on the proposed levy. Their proposals will be considered by the Secretary of State, who will first consult a tripartite group comprising representatives of police authorities, the police service and central Government. That group will consider the levies in the context of overall spending on the police. In the light of that consultation, the Secretary of State will either approve the levy or instruct the service authority to adjust it. His decision will be final.

In most other ways, the respective roles of the Secretary of State and service authorities reflect current arrangements for local police forces. For example, the role of the Home Secretary—in consultation with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland in relation to the National Criminal Intelligence Service—will be to set key objectives for each service, to call for reports and to require Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to conduct inspections.

The service authorities will set detailed objectives and publish service plans and annual reports on performance. They will appoint the director general and other senior police officers. Other officers will be seconded or loaned from their local force or organisations such as Customs and Excise. All staff will be under the direction and control of the relevant director general. The terms and conditions of service of staff will be decided by the service authority after consultation, in the case of police officers, with the police negotiating board. There will be full consultation with the police staff associations and trade unions on terms and conditions and the complaints and discipline system.

I turn now to part III of the Bill. I do not think that there is any dispute about the need of the police and customs to use intrusive surveillance against our most serious criminals. That effective and valuable technique must be available to our law enforcement agencies if they are to get the evidence that they need to bring our most dangerous criminals to court. We are not talking about petty crime, still less people going about their lawful activities. The Bill is aimed at major drug traffickers, kidnappers, terrorists and those involved in serious fraud and money laundering. These are the most dangerous criminals whose activities have a major impact on society—people who are well versed in policing methods and have the resources that they need to protect themselves from detection.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that this is a serious constitutional matter? Does he not therefore think that the Committee stage of the Bill should be held on the Floor of the House, so that parties from all over the United Kingdom will not be isolated—some of them not even represented on the Committee? The Bill affects my part of the country. I feel that the Committee stage of such a grave constitutional Bill should be held on the Floor of the House. Will the Home Secretary help us on that? I do not want to hinder him getting his Bill passed, but I must defend the rights of the people and their representatives to be heard, especially in Committee.

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. As I shall remind the House in a moment, the techniques in question have been used for a long time. The Bill introduces new safeguards, as well as putting the use of the techniques on a statutory basis for the first time. I do not follow the hon. Gentleman in his point, but of course he, his hon. Friends and others will have the fullest opportunity to put their points on Report.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South–West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, particularly in our constitution, there can never be an absolute guide on what is a constitutional question? When there is uncertainty, it is necessary to examine the political background. The Labour party has abandoned the proper adversarial role of the Opposition. As a result, there has not been adequate discussion about prior authorisation. That point therefore ought to be discussed on the Floor of the House, not in private Upstairs in Committee.

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that there is no absolute definition of a constitutional issue. However, I fear that I cannot follow him on the rest of his remarks. The Labour party, to be as fair to it as I can, has attempted to form a view on the right course to take on the Bill. I regret that it has not been constant in the view that it formed, but there it is. We have to do the best that we can with that.

Mr. Benn: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: I am answering my hon. Friend. I will give way in a moment. The right hon. Gentleman must contain himself. The provisions in the Bill have been extensively considered in another place and will no doubt be extensively considered in this House, including on Report.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Howard: I think that I indicated to the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that I would give way to him next.

Mr. Benn: The Home Secretary refers to terrorism, kidnapping, drug smuggling, and so on, and one understands that point, but one of the grounds for intrusive surveillance is given as

"conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose."

No crime is mentioned. That would apply to road protesters, trade unions and political parties. A Labour Home Secretary who regarded the Conservative party as

[Mr. Benn]

having a common purpose—as occasionally it does—would be entitled to bug any Conservative party office. That is the point that has aroused a great deal of concern, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not even touched on it.

Mr. Howard: I have not got very far into my speech, but I will answer the right hon. Gentleman's point now. There are crimes which might warrant the use of the powers that would not come under the second limb of the definition of serious crime in the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman has clearly looked at the matters closely, so he will be aware that the second limb refers to the likelihood of a first offender, 21 years old or over, getting a sentence of three years imprisonment. I hope that I may be able to carry the right hon. Gentleman with me on the point that there are criminal activities that would not fulfil that criterion but might merit the use of the powers by the police.

Mr. Benn *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head. Let me see if I can give an example which might cause him to reconsider. It is perfectly possible to conceive of a situation in which a large number of neo-Nazi youths concerted to disrupt a major football match. I suggest that that might very well merit the use of such investigative techniques. Nevertheless, if they were over 21 years old and of previous good character, none of the individuals involved might be sentenced for more than three years imprisonment for such an activity. That is what that limb of the definition is designed to cover.

I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to an additional safeguard. The statutory code of practice that we intend to provide in the Bill will enjoin chief officers of police to make a judgment about the proportionality of the use of the powers against the mischief at which they are targeted and which they are designed to prevent. Those safeguards should be sufficient to allay the anxieties to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I think that I owe my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) the next intervention.

Mr. Forman: When trying to assess such matters, I always try to look at such empirical evidence as may be available rather than at what might happen. The Library briefing on the matter states that the Government undertook an exercise, looking at the example of 1995, and found there were approximately 2,100 chief officer authorisations by police and Customs and Excise of intrusive surveillance operations in the United Kingdom. Can my right hon. and learned Friend give the House some idea of the rough breakdown between police and Customs and Excise on the one hand and between one kind of authorisation and another? It would help to inform today's debate.

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that I cannot do so at the moment. I shall cause inquiries to be made about whether I can answer the first part of my hon. Friend's question about the breakdown between police and Customs and Excise. I know that we cannot give a breakdown on the second part of his question. I can say, however, that the majority of operations that were authorised under the use of the powers do not involve the sensitive categories about which there has been a great deal of debate, particularly in the other place. The majority of the operations consist, for example, of placing a beacon under a motor car so that the motor car's movements can be traced. The vast majority of operations do not involve intrusion into private premises, lawyers' offices, medical surgeries or anything of that kind.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I want to make some progress, but I will give way to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Home Secretary goes on about safeguards, but in his statement yesterday, which he made with the approval of his Labour shadow—it was almost a joint statement—he said that prior approval would not be necessary even in sensitive cases. That drives a coach and horses through the safeguards. If the security services wish to undertake intrusive surveillance, the Home Secretary is not bypassed. The procedure has to be followed and the Home Secretary gives his approval even if he has to be disturbed in the middle of the night.

Mr. Howard: Those are different cases. One of the greatest weaknesses in the Liberal Democrats' position, and in their amendment that was carried in another place, is that it makes no provision for urgent cases. Even the latest communication from the chairman of the Bar Council, who has shared many of the right hon. Gentleman's concerns about the Bill, recognises the importance of making provision for urgent cases. I do not accept that such provision drives a coach and horses through the Bill—it is an essential safeguard.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Traditionally, the House has always regarded as constitutional those matters which affect the relationship of the citizen to the state or its agencies. The Bill undoubtedly touches on that issue. I cite the precedent of the Official Secrets Act 1989: there was no question about that being taken on the Floor of the House. The Bill would attack the rights of citizens over their domestic premises and their privacy, which is a major constitutional issue.

Mr. Howard: There are many precedents which point the other way, as I am sure that my hon. Friend would be the first to agree.

Mr. Shepherd: Cite them.

Mr. Howard: So that the list is as comprehensive as possible, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will cite the precedents when he winds up.

Much has been said about the Bill in another place and in the media. Much of it has been misleading and misinformed. We are not proposing a great constitutional change. Intrusive surveillance has been authorised by

chief officers for many years on the basis of Home Office guidelines first issued in 1977, when we had a Labour Government, and updated in 1984. The courts have accepted the evidence obtained from the use of those techniques as part of the prosecution case. The use of the techniques appears to have been authorised by chief constables with responsibility and restraint.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I must make some progress. I have given way generously, as the hon. Lady must accept.

Intrusive surveillance is used only in cases involving serious crimes and when there are no alternative methods available. In our view, the arrangements for authorising the use of intrusive surveillance must satisfy two basic principles. First, authorisations must be made by those with the training and operational experience to judge whether the surveillance is necessary. The person taking the decision must understand all the circumstances, including the investigative methods that have been used and the potential risk to public safety or even human life if surveillance is not attempted. Those matters go to the heart of policing. They should be decided by chief officers, subject to independent review that does not entail second-guessing of their operational judgments.

The second important principle is that those who authorise intrusive surveillance must be accountable for their decisions. Chief officers are accountable and they have in the past been required to justify their decisions in court. These are the principles which have guided my approach to the contradictory amendments tabled in another place.

Mrs. Clwyd: In the past half hour, the Home Secretary has given an omnibus answer to several questions on the use of mobile phones. He has been asked for the number of occasions on which access to the UK Cellnet system has been sought by each police authority. Most people in Britain have no idea that mobile phones are being used for this purpose. I found his answer—that the information was not held centrally—completely unsatisfactory, as most other people will. Should this matter not come within the scope of the Bill? The Home Secretary must surely address that point.

Mr. Howard: That matter involves other statutory provisions, as the hon. Lady will appreciate, but it is a matter of satisfaction to me that there is no central record of the number of occasions on which these powers have been used. The powers do not come within the control of any central authority in this country, but are exercised by local police officers who are accountable to local police authorities. I would not wish there to be any step that would attract these powers into a central repository. The hon. Lady should take some satisfaction from the fact that those records are not kept centrally.

I have described the principles that have guided my approach to the matter and the contradictory amendments tabled in another place. The amendment requiring all intrusive surveillance to have the prior authorisation of a circuit judge is unacceptable. As I have explained, I do not accept that judges can properly be expected to take these decisions. Furthermore, the absence of provisions for urgent cases—the very point on which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed intervened a few moments ago—would seriously inhibit the fight against serious crime. In hostage situations it could even endanger life, and I am not prepared to take that risk. It could also reduce accountability, because judges could not be called to account in the same way as chief officers. The amendment on that subject was moved by the Liberal Democrats in another place.

The amendment tabled by the Labour party in another place does not present quite the same difficulties. That is not altogether surprising, given the tortuous evolution of the Labour party's approach to this issue. When I originally announced my proposals and published the Bill, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) strongly supported them. He saw the need for them, and rebutted the criticisms which were made of them with vigour. Under a sustained onslaught from *The Guardian* and others, however, he subsequently retreated. That is perhaps an object lesson in what life would be like under a Labour Government—strong words, vigorous argument, but retreat at the first puff of pressure.

Faced with that reaction—and with the schizophrenic amendments passed in another place—I have considered what would be the best way forward. We had already amended the Bill in another place to provide for all authorisations to be notified to the commissioner as soon as reasonably practicable, and for there to be more than one commissioner to ensure that authorisations could be reviewed quickly. In most cases, that would have meant that a commissioner would be able to scrutinise the authorisation before the operation commenced and put a stop to the intrusive surveillance if he thought it outside the criteria of the Bill.

We intend to bring forward amendments in Committee which will modify clause 91—which was inserted in the other place—to build on the approach embodied in the Government amendments. Our changes will require that the approval of the commissioner is obtained before an operation begins where there are reasonable grounds for thinking that the operation could affect legal, medical or journalistic privilege, or where the operation involves intrusion into residential dwellings, offices or hotel bedrooms.

Prior approval will not be necessary where the police or customs are acting with the consent of the person who is able to give permission in respect of the relevant premises. Nor will prior approval be necessary in urgent cases, but the commissioner would have to be notified as soon as reasonably practicable after the authorisation had been given.

Where prior approval is required, the commissioner will give it if, to borrow words from the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984,

"he is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing"

that the authorisation fulfils the requirements in clause 92. Those requirements are that the action is likely to be of substantial value in the prevention or detection of serious crime and that what the action seeks to achieve cannot reasonably be achieved by other means.

The commissioner will not seek to put himself in the shoes of the chief constable. That is an important difference between our approach and the test favoured by the Labour party in another place, which would have involved second-guessing by the commissioner of the chief constable's decision.

[Mr. Howard]

Under our proposals, there will be no second-guessing of operational judgments. It will be for the chief officers to authorise and for the commissioners to scrutinise that authorisation to determine that there were reasonable grounds for the proposed action. I believe that our approach strikes the crucial balance of ensuring that operational decisions are left to those best qualified to take them, but that there is strong and independent scrutiny and oversight.

The measures ensure not only that there will be an effective oversight system that fully recognises the sensitivity of the operations, but that police and customs officers will continue to be able to deploy the most sophisticated methods necessary to achieve effective results.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): If surveillance is carried out under the urgency provisions and it is then reported to the commissioner, who takes the view that it was unreasonable and should not have taken place, will the evidence obtained be inadmissible in a court of law?

Mr. Howard: That will be a matter for the courts to decide. The commissioner will have the power to stop the operations there and then, to quash the authorisation and even to order compensation. Those are considerable safeguards. I am surprised that the hon. and learned Gentleman is not prepared to entrust the decision on admissibility to the discretion of the court.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): My right hon. and learned Friend knows that I approach the problem from a wholly different perspective, because I agree with him that there should be a regulatory framework but that the police definitely need the powers. Will he assure us that, under the provisions that he intends to introduce by amendment in Committee, what will matter is what the chief constable knew when he took the decision to authorise intrusive surveillance as an emergency, without the agreement of the commissioner, not second-guessing on information that may subsequently have been discovered suggesting that he ought not to have given the approval? Surely it is what he knew at the time of the decision to give approval that matters.

Mr. Howard: That is certainly the starting point, but I cannot give my hon. Friend the categorical assurance that he seeks. For example, the Bill rightly contains provisions that enable someone to complain about the authorisation, and part of the complaint may be that the chief constable could and should have made other inquiries at the time of the authorisation that would or should have led him not to make it. That would be a relevant matter to be taken into account. However, the information available to the chief constable at the time that he makes the authorisation will be the starting point for the scrutiny that the commissioner will exercise.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Inevitably, such operations result in the gathering of a lot of material that is subsequently found to be irrelevant and which may affect other people who are not involved in the criminal investigation. What will happen to that material? What assurance can the Home Secretary give that it will be destroyed, and how will it be stored in the meantime?

Mr. Howard: The commissioner has the power to call for all the information and material, and has specific power to instruct that that material should be destroyed. If it is not withdrawn into the hands of the commissioner, it will be a matter for the police, who will decide whether to retain the material on the basis of whether they think that it will be useful to them in pursuit of the inquiries on which they are engaged. That is a perfectly reasonable and sensible way to deal with the matter.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Will the Home Secretary expand on that point? As I read the Bill, the only reference in clause 97 to the destruction of records is when the commissioner has decided that the person who gave an authorisation was not acting properly. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) pointed out, there may well be cases in which the authorisation was proper and a great deal of information has been collected about people who are not the subject of the authorisation. That situation does not appear to be covered by the clause.

Mr. Howard: I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making.

Mr. Gerrard *rose—*

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that if, in pursuance of a properly authorised operation, the chief constable came across other information relevant to the investigation of a serious crime, he should destroy it, I utterly refute that suggestion. These are matters that can be left to the discretion of the chief constable, as they normally are.

Mr. Gerrard: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Home Secretary is clearly refusing to give way to me, having distorted what I said. I made it clear that I was talking about information relevant to people who were not concerned with the investigation under way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order for the Chair. It is up to the Secretary of State whether he wants to give way.

Mr. Howard: That was not a point of order and it was a point that I comprehensively answered. I will repeat my reply for the benefit of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). If in the course of investigating a serious crime, the police come upon other information relevant to another serious crime, I—and most citizens of this country—would expect them to use it in the course of that other investigation.

Mr. Budgen: Does my right hon. and learned Friend concede that it is obvious that the House is deeply concerned about the details of prior authorisation? This is the first time the House has been able to express its views on the details. Since the measure must carry the confidence of the whole country, on reflection would it

not be better to have a debate on the Floor of the House rather than to have the suspicion that it is being bashed through in a rather authoritarian way?

Mr. Howard: I do not make the concession for which my hon. Friend asks, and I ask him to reflect on the fact that if, on every Second Reading of a Bill at which concerns were expressed about the details, the matter were remitted to a Committee of the whole House, our proceedings would be considerably more cumbersome and protracted than they are.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I hope that I can ask this question in the well phrased and courteous way that is characteristic of the Home Secretary. It appears that the House is being asked to approve new methods of police surveillance hitherto not found acceptable and that he is asking us to pass a Bill that will make those methods acceptable in respect of a known crime. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) inquired what would happen with information obtained during one investigation, which was interesting but had no relevance to it.

How would that information then be used? Would it be in police records? Would it be used as a Member of Parliament democratically investigating one matter and finding information relevant to something else would use such information? Surely that is the nub of the question which concerns the House. In that respect, authorisation is vital. Otherwise the information would not be available.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise. There is no basis for the suggestion that the use of such powers has been found unacceptable over the years—they have led to remarkably few complaints and criticisms. I accept that it is desirable that those powers should be put on a statutory basis with additional safeguards, and that is what we have done. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members suggest from sedentary positions that nobody knew about that, but the guidance published by the Home Office in 1984 was public. I am not sure that the guidance published by the Labour Government in 1977 was public: the Opposition claim to believe in open Government, but I understand that the 1977 guidance was headed "confidential". The guidance published in 1984, however, was a public document available to all. Therefore, there has been no secret or mystery about the availability of the powers.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I have been bugged on at least two occasions, but I am unsure what variety of organisation was bugging me. I have two points. First, there has been a misunderstanding about the intervention of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard). I thought that he was asking what would happen with information that was incidentally gathered and which was not relevant to any other investigation. Would it be destroyed? Secondly, I wish to reinforce the points already made about the desirability of having a good debate on this issue in the House.

Mr. Howard: I am sure that we shall have a good debate on the Floor today, on Report and on Third Reading. On the destruction of material that is not relevant to any line of investigation, on the face of it I see no reason why that should be treated differently from any other material that comes into the possession of the police when they are engaged in an investigation. However, it is clearly a matter on which different views may be held and which can be considered in detail at the appropriate stage, both in Committee and on Report.

I am aware of the concerns that have been expressed about the possibility that the police might conduct surveillance of confessionals. The police have told me that this has never been necessary in the past and are happy to give an undertaking not to mount surveillance operations in circumstances covered by the seal of confession. We will finalise the details shortly, and will insert a specific reference to that undertaking in the code of practice.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) *rose—*

Mr. Beith *rose—*

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay)

Mr. Mackinlay: The seal of confession does not relate exclusively to Roman Catholics; it is held in high regard by the Anglican communion and by many other faiths, which have comparable counselling by religious ministers to their flocks. Will the Home Secretary undertake that such pastoral conversations, which have hitherto been held by democratic states to be of the utmost confidentiality, will be excluded from the surveillance provisions? Will there be privilege both for the sacrament of confession and for the traditional conversations between pastors and their flocks? Will that be in the code of practice?

Mr. Howard: I can certainly give an undertaking carefully to consider the hon. Gentleman's point and see to what extent we can take it on board in the code of practice. I suspect that there may be problems of definition which could give rise to some difficulty.

Mr. Shepherd: Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that Home Office guidelines, of which some of us were unaware, deposited in front of the House, can make lawful that which is unlawful or override common or statute law? That is the nub of the question. He is having to make it lawful because Home Office guidelines were not good enough cover. As upholder of our law and order, he must have regard to that which is lawful. Therefore, his response on guidelines is not good enough. The Home Office is trying to convert that which is currently unlawful under statute and common law into that which is lawful.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that Home Office guidance cannot do any of the things that he said it could not do—I entirely agree with him about that. The point that I was making in answer to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) was in response to his assertion that the exercise of these powers over the years has been found to be unacceptable. That is a much more contentious assertion. The truth of the matter is that these powers have been exercised over many decades without giving rise to any widespread concern. I accept that it is

[Mr. Howard]

preferable that they should be put on a proper statutory basis, with proper safeguards and that is why they are included in the Bill.

The provisions in part IV of the Bill to place the police information technology organisation on an independent tripartite footing have been well received on all sides—perhaps I ought to add, so far. We need to gain the maximum benefit from information technology and these new arrangements will help PITO to achieve its objective of providing the information technology and communications that best meet the needs of the police service

If we are to secure the maximum benefits from IT for the police service, we must make sure that we have the right structures in place to achieve that goal. PITO was set up on a non-statutory basis in April 1996. Much has already been done to create a more customer-focused organisation, but one important further step needs to be taken. By establishing PITO as an executive non-departmental public body, it will be possible to bring the chief officers and police authority associations into the heart of decision making.

Part V of the Bill contains provisions which bring into effect the proposals for access to criminal records for employment and related purposes that were set out in the White Paper "On the Record" which was published in June last year. Those proposals will put in place a coherent, transparent and fair system of access to criminal records for employment and related purposes. It will offer better protection to vulnerable groups and reassure employers that the information they are given about an applicant's criminal record is complete and accurate.

Mr. Benn: Will the Home Secretary give way? I wrote to him on this very point last year.

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman has not given me much time to get into my speech, but I will give way.

Mr. Benn: I wanted to give the Home Secretary the chance to answer this question in the body of his speech. First, if I applied for a job, could I require my employer to give me details of any criminal conviction so that I knew I would not be working for a drug dealer or a corrupt employer? Or is it only employers who can get such information about possible employees? Secondly, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman reassure me that all the information gathered by bugging and surveillance will be handed over to the European Union as part of the security arrangements reached with the European Union about the exchange of police information? This measure is not only about the relationship between the citizen and the British Government, but about the relationship between the citizen and the European security arrangements that the Home Secretary is setting up.

Mr. Howard: On the right hon. Gentleman's first point, I can give him an assurance that if the employer's work brings him into contact with vulnerable people in the way that is covered by the provisions of the Bill the employer himself will be covered by the provisions of the Bill in exactly the same way as anybody else whose employment brings them into contact with vulnerable persons will be covered.

On the second point—and this is a most important point—I can certainly give an assurance that, so long as there is a Conservative Government, the consequences that the right hon. Gentleman fears from the extension of this information to authorities of the European Union will not take place. However, I can give him no assurance that that will not happen if we were to have a Labour Government, since the shadow Foreign Secretary said only last week that he would accept the extension of majority voting into matters now covered by the third pillar arrangements of the European Union. That is the answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question. If he is concerned about these matters, he should address those concerns to his own Front Benchers and not to the Government.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Perhaps I may repeat for the benefit of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) a similar undertaking: in no sense will we allow such information to be passed to the European Union. As the Home Secretary well knows, we are committed to ensuring that all matters which come within the third pillar remain intergovernmental and therefore not subject to majority voting.

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has not seen the latest press release issued by his right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary. We shall have to help the hon. Gentleman by making that information available to him. I am afraid that the shadow Foreign Secretary has acknowledged beyond peradventure that, if this country is headed by a Labour Government at the intergovernmental conference due to take place at the end of June, concessions will be made that will do away with our veto, not only in areas that have specifically been identified, but in relation to justice and home affairs. It is absolutely clear, and the country should be aware, that that would be the consequence of a Labour Government if we were ever to have one.

We intend to set up a criminal records agency, accountable to the Home Office, to undertake the work for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, the work will be undertaken by the Scottish criminal record office. Those bodies will be able to issue three types of certificate.

The first type of certificate will be a criminal conviction certificate. These will be issued to individuals only and will give details of their convictions recorded in central police records that are not spent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. It will be for applicants and employers to decide when it is reasonable to require such a certificate to be produced.

The second type of certificate will be a criminal record certificate. These will contain details of spent and unspent convictions and cautions and will be available only for those occupations, such as doctors, nurses, teachers and prison officers, which are exceptions to the 1974 Act. A joint application will be made by the individual and the organisation seeking the check. The individual and the employer will be sent a copy of the certificate.

The third type of certificate will be an enhanced criminal record certificate. Initially, these certificates will be available only for those working on a regular, unsupervised basis with children; for certain licensing purposes; and for judges and magistrates prior to

appointment. As well as information on convictions and cautions, enhanced certificates will include non-conviction information from local police records, where that might be relevant to the post being sought. A copy of the certificate will be sent to the individual and the employer. In very exceptional circumstances, where on-going or future police investigations might be prejudiced, the information from the local police check will be provided only to the employer.

The Bill also makes provision for regulations to be made that will enable enhanced checks to be extended to those who work with vulnerable adults.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Would a long-term unemployed person be expected to pay as much as a tenner for the criminal conviction certificate, and how frequently would he be expected to provide an updated certificate?

Mr. Howard: I shall come to that point in a moment.

We intend the new system to be self-financing and for the costs to be met by individuals when they apply for a certificate. The fees charged will be modest, and are likely to be in the region of £5 or £6 for a criminal or criminal record certificate and £8 to £10 for an enhanced criminal record certificate.

When the Bill was considered in another place, it was amended to exempt volunteers from paying fees for criminal record checks. We opposed that move. The Government fully recognise and appreciate the good work that is done by the millions of volunteers in this country, and we have done much to encourage those who help their communities in that way, but the financial implications of the amendments are potentially enormous—costing possibly as much as £200 million.

We do not believe that it would be fair to redistribute those costs among other users of the agency. Some of them, as the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said, will be unemployed or otherwise on low incomes, and possibly less able to pay a fee than many volunteers. The only other option would be for the taxpayer to pick up the bill, but no public funds are currently available to meet the costs of providing free checks for volunteers.

We propose, therefore, to amend the Bill to remove the amendments made in another place, but to introduce an order making power to enable free checks to be provided for specific groups, such as volunteers, if and when the money became available to cover the costs of doing so.

Mr. Mackinlay *rose—*

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay).

Mr. Mackinlay: This afternoon I spoke to the chief executive of the Scout Association, who says that it will cost the association about £500,000 a year to fund this vetting and that, more importantly, it will be a disincentive to volunteering. The association wants total vetting to protect young people, but the association and many Labour Members feel that it would be grossly unreasonable that such a fee should be picked up by a voluntary organisation which does tremendous work for the community. It is absurd and ridiculous.

Mr. Howard: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, his question is absurd and ridiculous. He cannot have it both ways. He cannot at one and the same time point to the cost to the organisation and also suggest that the cost would be a deterrent to the individual volunteer: it must be one or the other.

It is unnecessary for the organisations to pay for the checks. The vast majority of volunteers will not be deterred from their voluntary activity by a one-off payment of £5 or £6. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of volunteers voluntarily incur expenses in the course of their volunteering which far exceed the cost of a check of £5 or £6. I do not believe that the provision will have the consequences to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I ask the Secretary of State to think again, especially about introducing an order. It is possible that some volunteers will not be deterred, but most volunteers are unemployed people. There are those who volunteer at a different level and could afford the expense, but many could not. Charities, especially, have already suffered as a result of the advent of the national lottery. I recognise that there might be cross-party support to keep the taxpayer clear, but it should not be a case of reversing the role of Robin Hood and taking from the poor to pay for the rich.

Mr. Howard: I am sorry to have to disagree with the hon. Gentleman. First, I am not sure that his observation about the effect of the lottery on charities is well founded. Secondly, I do not accept that a modest one-off payment will be a significant deterrent to volunteers.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, while a person who gives his time for nothing to work in a charity may find it acceptable, for example, to use his own transport to get to the place where he does the voluntary work, it is another thing entirely to ask that person to put his hand in his pocket and pay £5 or £6 to run a criminal record check on himself when he knows perfectly well that no criminal convictions are recorded against him? Such a person may see that as an insult, and certainly as a deterrent to volunteering his services.

Mr. Howard: I do not agree with my hon. Friend. The distinctive characteristic of volunteers is that they are generous and public-spirited. They will understand the importance of the checks and they will not be at all insulted at the notion of having a check. They will readily accept the importance of providing more protection for children, which the provisions will allow, and they will be ready to make the modest payment involved.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I entirely agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. Volunteers will be only too happy to know that other volunteers are clean. In the light of some of the dreadful cases that have occurred recently, volunteers will be happy to pay for peace of mind.

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's point.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is aware of the tremendous work done

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

by voluntary bodies in the north of Ireland. He should consider that every voluntary body conducts a massive lobby of the Members of Parliament for Northern Ireland. The largest lobby that I have ever had was on the right hon. and learned Gentleman's proposal, and I have been in the House for 27 years, as have my colleagues. People who are helping daily as volunteers to meet the needs of the community in Northern Ireland know the difficulties of telling an unemployed person that he would be excellent to do a job but that he will have to pay for a certificate to clear his name when in fact his name is clear. Could not the Home Secretary devise a system whereby a volunteer could take an oath in public declaring that his name is clear?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: That would cost a great deal more.

Rev. Ian Paisley: No. The notaries and members of the public would be working for the voluntary sector for nothing. There would then be no onus of payment on a volunteer working in the voluntary sector.

Mr. Howard: I fear that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), in her intervention from a sedentary position, may well be right. The attestation of such an oath before an official may well be more expensive than the very modest cost of the check that we envisage.

The voluntary sector has long been pressing for better access to criminal record information, and it welcomed our proposals when we first put them forward. But wider access costs money, and so cannot be provided unless the cost will be met. Our proposed approach will enable a balance to be struck between wider access funded by those who use the service and the provision of free checks to specific groups if financial resources permit.

The Bill contains a number of important safeguards to ensure that sensitive information is not misused. Employers who register with the agency will be required to abide by a code of practice. Good practice guidance on the application of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the need to consider the relevance of any convictions will be issued to registered bodies, and the Bill will also make it a criminal offence for a member, officer or employee of a registered body to disclose information about criminal records other than in the course of his duties.

Mr. Gerrard: Does the Minister agree that the code of practice would apply not to the criminal conviction certificate but to the full and enhanced certificates that would be relevant to registered bodies? Would that not leave all sorts of anomalies, with people applying for different jobs within the same organisation sometimes being asked for checks and sometimes not being asked? As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) pointed out, a person might be repeatedly asked to provide a new certificate. A prospective employer might not be interested in a three-month-old certificate but might want to see an up-to-date certificate, so the person will be faced repeatedly with having to find the money to pay for one.

Mr. Howard: On the first point, I do not think that the provisions would give rise to the anomalous consequences identified by the hon. Gentleman, but that could be looked at in detail in Committee and on Report. On the second point, we do not envisage it being possible for repeated requests for new certificates to be made. We envisage a time limit so that it is not incumbent on someone in the circumstances identified by the hon. Gentleman repeatedly to have to reapply for fresh certificates.

As my noble friend the Minister of State signalled in another place, we believe that these measures will help to put an end to the practice of enforced subject access when an employer requires an applicant to exercise his access rights under the Data Protection Act 1988 in order to pass on information about his criminal record. That practice is undesirable. It is contrary to the spirit of the Data Protection Act and, because it reveals details of both spent and unspent convictions, it undermines the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. We appreciate that, if enforced subject access were to continue, it might also undermine this Bill, which seeks to protect information about spent convictions. We are considering, therefore, what steps can be taken to outlaw that practice. However, it is not straight-forward and it has implications that go wider than criminal records.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful for what the Home Secretary has just said about the Data Protection Act. Does he not recognise that, as a result of the Bill, any person applying for any job anywhere in the land, even a job that does not involve sensitive work with young children or security, may be required to produce a criminal conviction certificate, and that any employer, particularly a trustee or a director responsible to shareholders, will feel increasingly obliged to ask for such a certificate? Does he not recognise what a massive change that is to the labour market?

Mr. Howard: I doubt that the draconian consequences that the right hon. Gentleman has identified will flow from the Bill. We must, however, recognise the legitimate concerns that have been expressed about the need to protect those who need protecting. That is at the heart of these provisions.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I would like to make progress, if I may.

The Bill will significantly strengthen the fight against serious and organised crime. The creation of the NCIS Service Authority and a National Crime Squad will ensure that intelligence is properly harnessed and that operations are carefully targeted to inflict the maximum damage on organised crime. Putting the authorisation of intrusive surveillance onto a statutory footing will ensure that the police and customs will have the tools that they need to prevent and investigate serious, organised crime, and there will be new, additional safeguards against any possible abuse. The provisions for wider access to criminal records will improve the protection of vulnerable members of our community and reduce the opportunities for those determined to abuse positions of trust to commit crime.

This is an important Bill. It will make life very much harder for major criminals. That is what the public want to see. That is what the whole House wants to see. That is, I believe, what the Bill achieves. I commend it to the House.

5 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Over the past decade and a half, recorded crime in this country has more than doubled. As the British crime survey and a number of local crime surveys have shown, the level of crime today is such that, over a three-year period, nearly three quarters of the population will have had a personal experience of crime, either directly as a victim or indirectly through having to share the distress and anxiety of crime committed against the family or a close friend. What turns the screw even more is the fact that the poorer people are, the more likely they are to be a victim of crime.

Much of the crime that affects people in their day-to-day lives appears to be disorganised: a crowd of youths whose behaviour changes from the exuberant to the threatening; the opportunist theft of a car stereo; or the quick break-in of a dwelling when the chance presents itself. But behind much apparently disorganised crime lies something altogether more sinister—organised crime.

Organised crime used to be involved mainly in armed robberies and protection rackets. Now its scope has extended far wider. Every gram of heroin that is sold on a street corner, every Ecstasy tablet that is passed on in a club, has behind its lethal trade some of the most ruthless individuals and gangs ever seen. On top of that danger, there is the continuing threat from terrorism. Staff turning up for work in Canary Wharf, or shoppers hoping to enjoy a Saturday morning shopping in Manchester, have a right to expect that they can go about their business without their lives being wrecked by the mindless, callous acts of the Provisional IRA.

I wish for the world of "Dixon of Dock Green"—but if that world ever existed, it has been and gone for sure. The most important civil liberty that it is our duty to protect is the freedom for citizens to live without fear. If we are to create safer, more orderly communities, we have to tackle crime and disorder as it occurs on the street, and take action to deal with its underlying causes. However, we also have to tackle serious crime more effectively and ensure that, within a clear framework of the law, the police and the other law enforcement agencies are given the tools to do the job that we ask them to undertake on our behalf.

In July 1995, the Home Affairs Select Committee produced an important report on organised crime. It was a unanimous report. It made many recommendations, one of which was that NCIS and the crime squads should be put on a proper statutory footing, and so, too, should the use of intrusive surveillance techniques by the police. The report was widely welcomed. It was also welcomed by Labour Front Benchers.

This time last year, during the proceedings on the Security Service Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and I referred to the need to bring the report's recommendations to fruition. Parts I, II and III of the Bill seek to do that. Parts I and II provide a proper statutory framework, for the first time, for NCIS and a new National Crime Squad.

Seventeen years ago, in a private Member's Bill that I introduced to improve police accountability, I proposed that there should be a new national police agency to take over the national police functions of the Metropolitan police and other agencies and organisations. Our tradition of locally based policing, with independent chief police officers, is key to the success of the British police and the fact that they are far more sensitive to local communities than many of their counterparts in other countries. However, we undermine rather than strengthen that tradition if we pretend that all policing can be undertaken within the boundaries of a local force. Serious crime and terrorism are national and international. The overall organisation of the police must reflect that.

I deal with those two parts of the Bill briefly because of time. Their provisions will need to be examined with great care in Standing Committee. Given the starting point, however, it was probably inevitable that two separate organisations had to be created. The fact that, in practice, their role will overlap is reflected in the requirement in the Bill for the supervising authorities to have common members. I believe that we have to keep an open mind on whether at some stage, and in the light of experience, a single national body would be the more effective arrangement.

I now deal with part III, on intrusive surveillance, which has aroused great interest outside and inside the House. The use by the police and other agencies of covert, secretive methods to obtain information is rightly one of the most sensitive parts of the criminal justice system. We know from the experience of other countries, including the United States during the McCarthyite period, that there is always the potential for such powers to be abused. Effective controls and checks must therefore be in place to ensure that that does not happen, to ensure that powers that should be used to detect and deter serious crime and terrorism are not more widely used to undermine the freedoms that citizens in a democracy should enjoy.

In securing a proper balance, and in judging what is proposed in the Bill, it is important that we begin from what is and what has been, not from what might have been but was not. When debate about the intrusive surveillance powers of the Bill first began in public, last November, much of the comment was so profoundly misinformed as to be downright ignorant. One newspaper commentator claimed that the Bill changed our constitution because

"for the first time in history, the police will exercise these powers without having to get a warrant".

That statement, picked up by many others, was completely untrue.

Mr. Budgen: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in view of the widespread misunderstanding, it would be very much better—to restore public confidence—if these issues, particularly that of prior authorisation, were debated on the Floor of the House rather than tucked away in semi-privacy upstairs?

Mr. Straw: I do not regard a Standing Committee as operating in semi-privacy—it is open to the press just as much as debates on the Floor of the House. Nor do I wish to subscribe to the hon. Gentleman's proposition that every Bill of importance has to be debated on the Floor of the House. *[Interruption.]* It is not, in my judgment, the same constitutional matter, for example, as the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, which palpably had to be debated on the Floor of the House because it had enormous constitutional significance. The hon. Gentleman and I may disagree on whether the Police Bill is a constitutional measure. I have made it clear, and will do so again, that I regard this measure as one that improves safeguards in the exercise of these powers rather than introducing these powers in this country in the first place.

[Mr. Straw]

I ask my hon. Friends and the hon. Gentleman to bear it in mind that, on all the best estimates, this Session of Parliament cannot last for much more than five weeks. There are other very important measures to which we attach great importance, particularly the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, and I would not wish extensive discussion on the Police Bill on the Floor of the House to lead to a situation where the Firearms (Amendment) Bill could not be enacted.

Mr. Cohen: Why can my hon. Friend not introduce a firearms Bill, as the first Bill of a Labour Government? Then at least we would not have a Bill that is as bad as the Police Bill.

Mr. Straw: I do not share my hon. Friend's view about the Police Bill. I also wish to see the Firearms (Amendment) Bill on the statute book as quickly as possible. If we form a Government—as I believe and hope we shall—we could not introduce such a Bill before July, so it probably would not get on the statute book until next December at the earliest. That is not an acceptable timetable for the introduction of a measure that should have been law by now.

The statement made in one of our serious newspapers that, for the first time in history, the police will exercise these powers without having to obtain a warrant was completely untrue. Intrusive surveillance techniques using electronic equipment have been used by the police for at least 30 years without a warrant being required or there being any formal system of judicial supervision.

Since at least 1965, Appeal Courts have accepted that evidence obtained in that way is admissible in the criminal courts. Until 1977, there was no Home Office guidance to police forces on how they should use these powers. In 1977, the Home Office, under my right hon. and learned Friend Lord Rees as Home Secretary, issued a page and a half of guidance in general terms. However, that guidance was not published until 1982. In 1984, more detailed guidance was issued and published, which made it the personal responsibility of chief officers to authorise the use of those techniques. Despite the fact that the guidance was made public, there were few calls at that stage for the system to be put on a statutory footing. No arrangements for systematic judicial supervision or for central record keeping were put in place.

Mrs. Clwyd: My hon. Friend will recall that I asked the Home Secretary how many applications had been received from the police to access the United Kingdom Cellnet system. He said that that information was not held centrally. In fact, he boasted that it was a good thing that it was not held centrally. The Interception of Communications Act 1985 provides that interception can be carried out only under a warrant issued by the Secretary of State. In that case, either the Secretary of State is breaking the law, or the police are.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, and for raising it with me previously outside the House. I thought that the Secretary of State's answer was one of the least convincing of all those that he gave in reply to interventions—and there was much competition for that prize. It is nonsense for the Secretary of State to suggest that, because some decisions are rightly made by independent chief officers, there should not be proper and comprehensive record keeping. Records are kept on plenty of other police operations, so they should be kept in that case.

The interception of telephone calls from mobile telephones is covered by the Interception of Communications Act 1985 under the proper statutory system, so there should be information about that. From reading the written answer that my hon. Friend was given, it does not appear that the collection of subscriber data—when the calls were made and from where—is subject to the 1985 Act. The collection of such data by the police may be necessary for the detection of serious crime, but it should be regulated either by the 1985 Act, by this Bill or by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. It must be subject to statutory supervision under one of those provisions, and we shall certainly raise this matter in Committee.

Despite the fact that no central records have been kept, or any systematic arrangement for judicial supervision made, chief police officers have not been unaccountable for their actions in authorising intrusive surveillance. On a number of occasions, they have been called by the defence to give evidence in court to justify their decision to authorise such surveillance. Although a non-statutory system was and is inherently unsatisfactory, it must also be said that, in practice, there have been remarkably few complaints about the way in which chief officers have met their responsibilities.

This time last year, the role of the Security Service was extended, with our backing, so that it could support the police in the detection of serious crime. The same Bill required that the use of intrusive surveillance techniques by the Security Service in that area should require, by statute, the Home Secretary's authorisation. That put into sharp relief the need for the use of those powers by the police to be placed on a similar statutory footing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth and I—and, it has to be said, the Government Front-Bench team—made clear when we discussed that Bill.

The Police Bill, as originally published, provided that the use of any intrusive surveillance techniques by the police had to be authorised by the relevant chief officer according to strict criteria laid down in the Bill. There was then to be a system of judicial supervision of the use of such powers by a commissioner, who would be a senior High Court judge appointed for that purpose. That system parallelled that used for phone tapping, for which the commissioner is Lord Nolan, who is better known for his work on improving—or trying to improve—standards of conduct in public life.

I said when the Bill was published, and I say again, that, on any basis, the system in the original Bill was a significant advance on the non-statutory arrangements that have applied for the past 30 years. However, we were concerned from the start that the Bill provided insufficient protection for the work of lawyers, doctors and journalists. As the debate has progressed, I have also accepted that the basic arrangements in the Bill for judicial supervision should be significantly strengthened.

In the other place, the Government accepted our proposals that the number of commissioners should be increased from one to at least three, and that for all

authorisations the time scale for informing a commissioner of an intrusion had to be shortened, so that, in many non-urgent cases, the commissioner could quash an authorisation before the operation had taken place.

Mr. Forman: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument and his explanation of the way in which his party's policy has evolved. What is his understanding of the words in clause 91(2):

"Where it is not reasonably practicable to apply to a Commissioner for advance approval under subsection (1)"?

Can the hon. Gentleman give the House a good example, from his own knowledge or from his thought processes, of where it would not be reasonably practicable to apply to the commissioner?

Mr. Straw: The purpose of the phrase "not reasonably practicable" was to allow the police, when there was great urgency about placing some intrusive device, to carry out the operation on the chief officer's authorisation, and retrospectively to obtain the consent of the commissioner. If, for example, a kidnapping has taken place, the police may not have time to plan an operation, as they would for a drug dealer. With a kidnapping, they have to act quickly: they may be following a vehicle that is going to the place where the kidnap victim is to be held, but they would not know where that place was until moments before the kidnap victim and the kidnappers arrived. It would be absurd to expect the police to seek approval from a commissioner, and even more absurd to expect them to go to a circuit judge.

I have discussed this matter extensively with chief officers, as I hope the House would have expected me to do. I do not believe that they want to abuse that provision, because if they did, their authorisations would be quashed by a commissioner. Moreover, at the end of the year, the commissioner, in his report to the Prime Minister, which could be published, could name a chief officer who had transgressed the terms of the Bill. It would still be possible, as it has been for the past 30 years, for the chief officer to be taken to court to explain why he gave his authorisation.

A code of practice will be laid down under the provisions of the Bill, which will require the approval of both Houses of Parliament by affirmative resolution following consultation. It is my hope and intention that that code of practice should more specifically lay down the circumstances in which the urgency provisions should apply.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be more appropriate if we at least had the draft code of practice before us on Second Reading? The contents of the code go to the heart of this part of the Bill. We could make a much more intelligent contribution to the debate, and decide how to vote later this evening, if we knew the contents and intentions of the code of practice.

Mr. Straw: It is a fact that the code of practice has already been published in draft, and was available for discussion in the other place.

Mr. Mackinlay: I was able to extract a copy by fax from the Home Secretary's office at lunchtime, but copies have not been available in the Vote Office: as far as I am aware, they are not available now, although I have asked for them repeatedly. I do not know whether I can use your good offices, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to have that checked, but copies of the code are not available. I defy my hon. Friend to obtain a copy in the next few minutes.

Mr. Straw: I know that the code is available, because I happen to have a copy. If it is not available in the Vote Office, it ought to be. I entirely accept that it should be available to the House, but that is the responsibility of the Home Secretary and his colleagues, not my responsibility. It is a matter of fact that the code of practice is available—I have read it—but I do not believe that it should go into law in its present form. There should be the widest possible consultation on its terms, as indeed there will be.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: The hon. Gentleman gave an instance of the bugging of property in an emergency. I do not think that the House has any difficulty with that, in that a helicopter or an unmarked police car may follow a vehicle, and other provisions in criminal law give authority in such circumstances. Will the hon. Gentleman reflect, however, on the question of homes and property? What emergency could arise that would not be covered by the remit of the Security Service Act 1996—which the hon. Gentleman mentioned himself—and the warranting that is necessary in that context? The intelligence services can follow through serious crimes involving, for instance, drugs.

What circumstances are so urgent that the proper provisions of law that now exist—which give police officers the right of access to premises, and so forth—are not sufficient? What could bring about circumstances that are so urgent that action in the tradition of the whole common law world requires prior authorisation?

Mr. Straw: I do not think that occasions will arise very often when, if the police want to place an intrusive device in someone's home or office, the circumstances will be so urgent as to require them to use the second limb of the amendment that was passed in the House of Lords by a large majority, but there will be some such occasions. I gave the example of kidnapping. I understand that many kidnap victims are taken to hotel rooms, but if they were taken to private houses exactly the circumstances that I have described would arise.

Mr. Budgen: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once already. I will give way to him again, but then I should like to get on with my speech.

Mr. Budgen: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the use of a code of practice is unsatisfactory, particularly when the House does not have access to it? It would be much better if the code were incorporated in the statute, which would require either the House or the Standing Committee to consider it a great deal more carefully.

Mr. Straw: One of the great benefits of Standing Committee proceedings, in my experience—I do not know how often the hon. Gentleman sits on such Committees—is that the details of such codes, and of other provisions, can be examined at length. Far more

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forensic scrutiny is possible in Committee than is possible on the Floor of the House. Moreover, the code of practice is not an informal document; it will take the form of a statutory instrument, which must be subject to an affirmative resolution by both Houses of Parliament.

Mr. Mackinlay: That means one hour's debate.

Mr. Straw: I accept that. If my hon. Friend wants to serve on the Standing Committee and suggest that more time should be allowed, that is fine, but the arrangement seems very sensible to me. Labour as well as Conservative Bills have provided in the past, and will provide in the future, for detailed matters relating to the operational parts of Bills to be the subject of more extensive codes and guidance.

By the largest majority in recent history, the other place approved a Labour amendment requiring the prior approval of a commissioner for any intrusion into premises without the consent of the occupier. As we have heard, the same amendment accepted that, in urgent cases, an operation could go ahead on the authorisation of the chief officer, with scrutiny by a commissioner as soon thereafter as reasonably practicable.

In framing the amendment for their Lordships, I sought to do two things. First, I sought to ensure that people's right to believe that their home was their castle was guaranteed; secondly, I sought to ensure that controls on the police were proportionate, and did not gratuitously undermine the difficult and sometimes dangerous work that we expect them to do on our behalf. It is because of the need to balance those two considerations that we have never supported, and do not support, the Liberal Democrat amendment which was also passed by their Lordships, albeit with a smaller majority.

That amendment substitutes a circuit judge for the chief officer in every case. It has two overwhelming defects. First, it takes no account of the reality of some police operations in which the need for speed is essential. An Englishman's home may be his castle, but an Englishman's stolen car is not. Yet, when the police suddenly, and with notice, had the opportunity to place a tracking device on a stolen vehicle that was about to be used in an armed robbery or for drug running, the Liberal Democrats would expect them in every case to go off to a circuit judge for approval before the operation could take place. The practical effect would be that the operation could not take place at all.

The second objection is this: a transfer of decision for the initial authorisation from a chief officer to a circuit judge would have wholly undermined the responsibility of the chief officer for the actions of the police under his command. The fact that under the present arrangements, and under the Bill, the chief officer may have to answer in court for his or her authorisation is a powerful discipline and control on the use of such powers. It is possible that the Liberal Democrats have not been immune to those arguments. Their reasoned amendment says something remarkably different from the policy that they pursued in the other place. It speaks only of prior judicial authorisation for the bugging of private places, which is a much more limited proposition than the Lords amendment.

Following their Lordships' decisions on our amendment, discussions took place between the Home Secretary and me. The result of those discussions is reflected in a written answer given to me yesterday evening, which will form the basis of amendments that will be tabled in Committee in due course.

Mr. Mackinlay: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will forgive me. We were told a few minutes ago that the draft code of practice was available, and I said that it was not. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) has now been to the Vote Office to check, and has discovered that it is not available. It is clearly available to Privy Councillors, but not to hon. Members. I cannot make the position any plainer: a document that has been referred to in the House is not available to hon. Members. Could we have some protection and intervention on your behalf, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It is fundamentally important for us to have access to the document.

Mr. Howard: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The point about the code is that it will need to be amended—in particular, to deal with many of the points that have been commented on this afternoon. I am, however, making arrangements for it to be deposited in the Table Office as soon as possible.

Mr. Budgen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Let me deal with the other points first. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) will have heard what the Home Secretary said. As the document has not been formally laid before the House, it is not up to the Clerks to make it available; it is up to the Government.

Mr. Budgen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will the Home Secretary confirm that he is proposing to lay the code of practice before the House in the form of a statutory instrument, and that the House will have no opportunity to amend it or consider it in detail? Will he confirm that it will be either passed or rejected after a debate in general terms lasting an hour and a half?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair, as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, but I am sure that the Home Secretary will have heard what he has said.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have elevated me to the Privy Council, but that is premature, although some of us may hope.

The Home Secretary spoke of puffs of smoke. I can only say that what was required to make him perform what has been described as a U-turn was not so much a puff of smoke as a single breath from an hereditary peer—or two or three.

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I am coming to the Secretary of State's aid, if he would hang on just one moment.

In his defence, and mine, our capacity for reassessing our position in the light of representations is nothing compared with that of *The Guardian*. It has waxed eloquent about this issue since it discovered towards the end of November that it was a great matter of civil liberties. I speak only in the Secretary of State's defence—I see it as part of my role. It must be said in his favour that, when he made a speech on 2 July to the Association of Chief Police Officers setting out in considerable detail what would be in the Bill and going through the various ways in which surveillance could be achieved—for example, under provisions that were exactly those in the original Bill—*The Guardian* did not report it as a major breach of civil liberties.

I have *The Guardian* of Wednesday 3 July 1996. It is a useful historical record, which *The Guardian*, as we speak, is trying to excise from its database. It says:

"Howard sets statutory code for police bugs"

and then claims that the Home Secretary's proposal would lead to

"Greater accountability in police bugging and electronic surveillance operations".

It has been suggested occasionally that some people have come late to this issue. I say in defence of the Secretary of State defence and myself only that he and I were there a bit before some of the newspapers.

Mr. Beith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: And certainly before the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman had better look back to what I said more than a year ago on the Security Services Bill, or he could refer to his letter to *The Guardian* of 30 November, in which he said:

"In what has to be a system which operates in secret, we think that, in practice, there will be greater accountability if the onus is placed squarely on the chief officer to ensure compliance with the law, and if his or her decisions are then subject to effective supervision by a senior judge".

There is nothing about prior approval. I welcome his conversion; I simply wish that it had been more complete.

Mr. Straw: That is exactly my position and I made that clear. One of the reasons why the Liberal Democrat amendments are not just wrong but daft is that, apart from being wholly inoperable and wrecking important surveillance—for example, by proposing tracking devices on vehicles, despite all evidence from the police—they remove the responsibility rather than the power of the chief officer.

The right hon. Gentleman, who has been elevated to that noble position, should talk to middle-ranking police officers who have had to go to their chief officers to gain these authorisations. They have told me—I take the advice of those to whom I have spoken seriously—that, in practice, it is far easier to obtain authorisation for a warrant from a circuit judge or magistrate under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 than to get authorisation for placing intrusive surveillance from the chief constable. Why? It is because, unlike circuit judges, chief constables know that, if they get it wrong—or even if they get it right—they may have to justify their decision in open court. That is why I was determined to stick to the Bill's central provision that the responsibility for authorisation had to be on the chief officer, with judicial supervision.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman will know that I have listened to the views of chief officers, middle-ranking officers and serving police officers over a long period, not only in my capacity as a party spokesman but as a member of the Intelligence and Security Committee. The hon. Gentleman's description of the procedure employed by chief constables is correct. As it takes some time for such an application to be properly considered by a chief constable, why cannot the hon. Gentleman envisage the system being used—as it is now in front of a chief constable—to ensure that prior authorisation is given, even in urgent cases? Under the present system, chief constables have to deal with urgent cases in a formalised way, as does the Home Secretary in respect of the Security Service. The system can be made sufficiently efficient to do that.

Mr. Straw: If the right hon. Gentleman has talked to the police, it is a great shame that he did not pass on what he learned to Lord Rodgers, whose opinions were informed by almost total ignorance about police operations in this sector. I am astonished that the right hon. Gentleman did not learn from chief constables that in urgent cases the chief officer must give authorisation by telephone. Let me give him an example that would have been completely disrupted by his amendment.

There is a difference—the Home Secretary can speak for himself about this—between the sort of operation that may be undertaken by the Security Service and what a local police force may do, but let me take a tangible example that occurs quite often. When the police spot a stolen vehicle that they have reasonable grounds for believing is about to be used in an armed robbery, they will wish to place a tracking device on it. Under the amendment moved by the noble Lord Rodgers, the authorisation for placing the tracking device under the vehicle would have to be subject to approval by a circuit judge. So we would have an extraordinary pantomime whereby the detective constable in charge of tracking the vehicle would have to stop, go to the chief officer and fill in a variety of forms. He would then have to find a circuit judge.

Mr. Beith: He does that now.

Mr. Straw: No, he does not. After finding a circuit judge, he would have to gain authorisation. The detective constable might be lucky and the stolen vehicle might still be there 24 or 48 hours later when he returns. However, the evidence that I have suggests that, on the whole, armed robbers do not oblige the police in that way.

I was told—I am sorry to say that I accepted this in terms of the advice from the police—that the proposal would wreck police operations and lead to the committing of many more armed robberies and to the guilty getting away with it. I am not surprised that the right hon. Gentleman is looking perplexed. By now, he should appreciate what his noble Friends in the other place did

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not appreciate: that their amendment would have undermined the responsibility of the chief constable and wrecked many possible police operations.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall do so for the last time.

Mr. Allason: Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the issue of electronic surveillance, will he clarify two issues? Is it Opposition policy that the Bill should extend warrant powers to include telephone data—not just the interception of telephone conversations, but details of telephone calls from a particular number?

Does the hon. Gentleman propose to include all passive tracking devices? As he has spoken to the police and to other agencies, he will be aware that one method of electronic tracking is passive. It involves painting the top of a suspect vehicle with invisible infrared reflective paint that can be tracked by helicopter. It is a useful device, but it does not involve any electronic intrusion of the vehicle concerned. Under those circumstances, would he consider extending the Bill or does he think that they are covered already?

Mr. Straw: It is a moot point whether invisible ink on the top of a vehicle amounts to interference with property as defined by the Bill. I do not have a specific answer to the hon. Gentleman's second point. It is no doubt a matter that he will wish to pursue if he gets on to the Standing Committee. On the first point, as I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for, which valley is it—

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Cynon Valley.

Mr. Straw: Cynon Valley. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry. I was brought up in Essex, not in Llanelli like the Home Secretary, and I have never been able to pronounce Welsh names—or indeed to remember them.

The first point that the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) made involved whether data relating to telephone calls should be subject to the Bill's provisions. As I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), it should be subject to the provisions of one or other of the Acts—the Interception of Communications Act 1985, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act or this Bill—that control the use of such operations by the police. I want to think about it, but the matter should be put on a proper statutory footing.

Mr. Allason *rose—*

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I shall not give way; the Secretary of State spoke for more than an hour. I have spoken for 38 minutes and many other hon. Members wish to participate in the debate.

The amendments that will be proposed will significantly strengthen judicial supervision under the Bill. Prior authorisation, subject to an urgency provision, will be required for intrusion into homes, offices and hotel bedrooms. That seems to cover the main "private places" referred to in the Liberal Democrats' reasoned amendment, which represents another U-turn by them.

The absolute confidentiality of discussions between lawyer and client is essential if the legal profession is to operate effectively in any society. That principle is an absolute, and it is the essence of legal professional privilege. When dealing with an amendment tabled by Labour in the other place, Baroness Blatch said:

"We accept entirely that the police should not be allowed to set out to listen in or otherwise to interfere with confidential conversations between a lawyer and his client or a doctor and his patient."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 28 January 1997; Vol. 577, c. 1095.]

That is a very important statement by the Minister on behalf of the Government, and it is certainly one to which we entirely subscribe.

Our view, and the essence of what we have argued in the other place, is that intrusion into what would otherwise be legal professional privilege should be allowed only when privilege is used by people who are not lawyers as a cloak for a criminal conspiracy or criminal activities, or when lawyers themselves are involved in similar unlawful activities.

The amendments will also make provision, similar to that contained in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, for doctors and journalists, and, as we have heard, they will preserve the absolute sanctity of the confessional. As a communicating member of the Church of England, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) for informing us that confession occurs in Protestant churches as well as in the Roman Church. I was not aware of that in my own church, and I note that the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) was not either.

Mr. John Greenway *indicated assent.*

Mr. Straw: This Bill has been a great learning process.

Mr. Mackinlay *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I think that I am about to learn something more.

Mr. Mackinlay: Indeed. One of the parts of the law of England is the Church of England's unrepealed Canon 113 of 1603, which enshrines the secrecy of confession in the established Church. The point, however, is not merely a matter of the secrecy of confession; it is that all ministers of religion should have access to and conversations with members of their flock, ring-fenced and privileged. Although I welcome the undertakings about lawyers and doctors given by the shadow Home Secretary, will he undertake that—if he has stewardship over the code of practice—conversations between ministers of religion and members of their flock will be explicitly exempted from surveillance and bugging provisions?

Mr. Straw: I will discuss that in more detail with my hon. Friend, and will learn a good deal more about his expertise regarding the 1603 settlement. I have read the Book of Common Prayer from cover to cover many times while sitting in chapel at school, but I do not remember

that part—although I remember that the 42 articles were reduced to 39. I certainly accept that, if confession takes place in Protestant churches, we shall have to consider the matter seriously. I have absolutely no intention of undermining the sanctity of the confessional.

Under the original Bill, the commissioner would apply the test of judicial review. In other words, the commissioner would have to examine an authorisation and judge whether it was so unreasonable that no sensible officer could have granted it. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for proposing that there should be a more positive test, which would be similar to, although not exactly the same as, that which applies in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

We never intended that the commissioner should second-guess. The issue was always whether the chief officer would base his decision on the criteria in the Bill, and whether the commissioner—either prospectively or retrospectively—would check that decision to satisfy himself that the chief officer of police had based his decision on the Bill's criteria.

Mr. Richard Shepherd *rose—*

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I must make progress; I have already been generous with my time and with that of the House.

The Secretary of State has made provision for appeals and for improvements to the tenure and status of the commissioners by ensuring that they will be appointed by the Prime Minister, after consultation with the Lord Chancellor; that they will serve for a set term; and that they can be removed only by resolution of both Houses of Parliament.

Before moving on to part V of the Bill, I should mention that, in the course of an answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), the Secretary of State attempted to invent Labour party policy on the third pillar. I have made it clear that that was an invention, and my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary has issued this statement:

"The Labour party has always been clear that it will retain the veto on issues in the Third Pillar of the European Union such as border controls, immigration, asylum and police co-operation. We have never changed that position and"

the Secretary of State's

"suggestion to the contrary is just another"—

I will have to translate the phrase as "inexactitude", although I am sure that hon. Members know what that word means outside the House.

Mr. Benn: The precedent for the matter is, of course, nothing whatever to do with Europe. The United States supplied American warheads to Britain, for nuclear purposes, on the condition that it supervised all the intelligence services in Britain—I know that because I was in charge of them—and that all the Government communication headquarters bugging that goes on be made available to the Central Intelligence Agency. It is not a new point.

My question was whether, under security arrangements already entered into, the information would be available—as I believe it will be—to the European security authority, which is just as keen to deal with crime as the Secretary of State and my hon. Friends. My hon. Friend must not think that it is a precedent, because it has gone on for years. The trouble is that the matter has never been taken seriously, although it has been written about by many people, including me.

Mr. Straw: As we now know, I am not a member of the Privy Council. My right hon. Friend is, and I do not have anything like his experience or knowledge of the secret parts of Government. Therefore, I am in no position to comment on them.

I have already mentioned the code of practice. If Labour is elected, I believe that there should be wide consultation on the draft before it is laid before the House. I also believe that, after the new statutory regime has been in operation for a year, a full review should be undertaken, with an opportunity for a debate. If we form the next Government, I shall seek to ensure that that is done.

On part V of the Bill, the maintenance of a comprehensive system of criminal records is essential for the prevention and detection of crime, for the wider protection of the public and as part of the sentencing process and the sentence. In many cases, although by no means all, the shame of having a criminal record is as much a punishment as a formal sanction of the court.

However, an important balance should be struck. For less serious offences—which pose no significant risk to the public—there must come a moment when an offender can draw a line in the sand and say that he or she has paid the price to society for his or her crime and that he or she should now be given the opportunity to put the past behind him or her. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 was and remains an important measure in ensuring that offenders are rehabilitated and go on to lead law-abiding lives.

There are more serious crimes, for which the balance must be struck at a different point—as the 1974 Act realises, with its distinction between sentences below or above 30 months. In one sense, of course, the need to rehabilitate such offenders is all the greater because of the gravity of their crime, and we should never give up trying to do that, but there is also a much greater risk to the public from such offenders. Therefore, the public must have a greater right, in properly defined circumstances, to know about the offender's record.

There is a third category of offender, encompassing those whose formal criminal record may be very slight or non-existent but whose behaviour poses the greatest risks to communities, and especially to women and to children. The challenge to achieve the right balance between civil liberties and public protection is at its most acute with the third category. So far as I am aware, Thomas Hamilton, in Dunblane, had no serious previous convictions to his name, and he could—and did—claim that he was of good character. However, as we know from the Cullen inquiry, plenty of intelligence showed the terrible side of his character. Had it been possible to take greater account of that intelligence, Hamilton would not have been able to obtain a firearms certificate and he might have been prevented from his wholly undesirable involvement with children.

Part V attempts to reflect what I believe is a natural hierarchy of seriousness in criminal convictions. There will, as we have heard, be ordinary criminal conviction certificates that cover only non-spent convictions, criminal record certificates that cover all convictions and enhanced criminal record certificates that also cover non-conviction information.

[Mr. Straw]

I shall deal first with the more comprehensive certificates and then return to the ordinary ones. Clause 104 provides for criminal record certificates in which, for more sensitive areas of employment, full criminal record checks, including spent and unspent convictions, will be made available to employers by the agency. The types of employment covered by the arrangements will include jobs that involve regular contact with children and other vulnerable groups—the elderly, sick or handicapped people—those involved in work related to national security, the administration of the law, sensitive licensing areas or professions in areas such as health, pharmacy and the law, and senior managers in banking and financial services.

Clause 105 provides for enhanced criminal record certificates on which, for particular sensitive areas of work or licensing, additional information will be made available from local police records. That will include some non-conviction information. The posts envisaged are prospective employees, trainees and volunteers having regular, unsupervised contact with children and young people under the age of 18 and those applying for gaming, betting and lottery licences. The Penal Affairs Consortium correctly said that those provisions made sense.

The purpose of criminal conviction certificates is, in one sense, prosaic and straightforward. The certificate is a facility that enables an individual to verify a statement made by him in circumstances in which he should in any event be under an obligation to tell the truth. As someone involved in the employment of staff—as a Member of Parliament and, more frequently, as a school governor—I want and need to know whether an applicant for a position has any unspent previous convictions. I need to know not to blackball an applicant with a record, but to have the fullest information available when reaching a decision.

Applicants for any job certify that the information given is correct. Giving false information is grounds for instant dismissal when an appointment is made. On one level, therefore, the availability of the certificates can be presented as administrative, making it easier to provide firm and accurate information that applicants have to provide anyway.

However, because there will be a formal and straightforward system where none has existed, demand for certificates may grow. That has led responsible organisations that deal with offenders and ex-offenders to express understandable anxieties that the provisions could make it much more difficult to rehabilitate former criminals through gainful employment. Those anxieties must be addressed seriously in Committee.

There is an overwhelming case for making the provisions of the code of practice mandatory for employers in respect of all the certificates. The code will be mandatory for employers in respect of the higher level certificates, so why not in respect of all of them? We must also recognise that, if we want more, rather than fewer, ex-offenders appropriately employed—and therefore going straight—we have to change the attitudes of many job givers as much as we have to change the law.

The White Paper "On the Record" said that there would be a requirement in the code for employers to have a written policy and strategy for the employment of ex-offenders. That commitment was wrongly dropped in the other place. The commitment should apply to all certificates. Some employers, large and small, are enlightened in their employment of ex-offenders. We must draw on that best practice. Along with the widened provisions of a code of practice, we should try to agree a protocol on the employment of ex-offenders with the main employers' organisations and the trade unions. In government, I would certainly aim for that.

In the other place, an amendment was passed by two votes to exempt volunteers from the charges for certificates. Voluntary organisations and their volunteers play a critical role in society, enriching and binding it. We need more volunteers, not fewer. We need to make it easier, not more difficult, for people to volunteer. The likely charge of £5 to £8 for the certificates will appear modest to some volunteers, but may appear gratuitously off-putting for others. There is a strong view throughout the voluntary sector that it would be wrong to make the charge a tax on volunteering. Voluntary organisations would therefore have to pick up the tab. It is also felt that the charge is inconsistent with the Government's declared intention in the "make a difference" initiative.

The whole House—not least Labour Members—must recognise that there would be a cost to the public purse in meeting the so-called Weatherill amendment. I am not certain that the upper limit cost of £200 million bears much serious examination. The figure appears to be based on 20 million volunteers paying £10 a time. Informed estimates given by several organisations are that no more than 4 million people have direct access to children and vulnerable people. The figure at the lower end of the rough estimate of charges, which is all that we have to go on, is only one tenth of that used by the Minister. There is an annual turnover of 20 per cent., so the annual costs might be lower, at about £4 million—a rather different scale of problem from that suggested by the Secretary of State, although it is still a cost to the public purse.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem affects not merely voluntary organisations? There are 100,000 registered child minders in this country, many of whom do not earn much more than £2 an hour. A child minder with a partner and several teenage children might have to pay as much as £50 for certification. Would that threaten the registration process and encourage some people not to register as child minders? The National Childminding Association has raised that issue.

Mr. Straw: I accept the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed, and I hope that the matter can be discussed in more detail in Committee.

I want volunteers and voluntary organisations to be helped as much as possible. I am glad that the Secretary of State has accepted the proposition that there should be a power to exempt categories of volunteers from the charges. I accept that it may be necessary to have a power to exempt other categories, such as the long-term unemployed. The figures and mechanisms for that deserve further scrutiny. We shall scrutinise that in Committee. In government, we would seek to minimise the burden on voluntary organisations as public finances allowed, although I do not think that we could end it altogether.

The Bill proposes the creation of a new agency. The experience of setting up new agencies is not happy. The Crown Prosecution Service and the Child Support

Agency are the best and worst examples, but by no means the only ones. Agencies set up from scratch and all at once have a habit of early systemic failure that can last for years. A high error rate has had severe consequences for the CSA. If the new criminal records agency made similar mistakes, it would be catastrophic for public confidence and would undermine the purpose for which it is to be established.

I therefore believe that the agency must be created at a measured pace. There is a strong case for phasing in the arrangements, starting with the certificate regime that is most needed to protect the public—that contained in clauses 104 and 105 for criminal records certificates and enhanced certificates. Once that system had bedded down, the regime in clause 103 could be introduced. That phasing would also allow more time for consultation with employers, trade unions and voluntary organisations about appropriate safeguards for the issue of certificates.

The first three parts of the Bill contain measures that we have sought to put NCIS, the crime squads and intrusive surveillance on a proper statutory basis. We also support the establishment of the criminal records agency, but with the important safeguards and reservations that I have expressed. We shall ensure that the detail of the Bill is properly examined in Committee and on Report. Meanwhile, we shall ensure that the Bill receives its Second Reading.

5.58 pm

Sir Nicholas Scott (Chelsea): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a modest contribution to the debate. I shall be brief because I know that many others want to speak. I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to those present in the Chamber, as I shall not be present for the whole debate because of unavoidable commitments outside the House later this evening.

The thrust of the Bill is to protect the public from the activities of criminals. We know from reading newspapers, watching television and listening to the radio how an increasing threat of crime affects the lives of more and more of our citizens. At the same time, there is no doubt that we have to be conscious of the return of a terrorist threat to this country. We must respond to those twin threats in considering the Police Bill. Therefore, I strongly commend my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for bringing it forward. I realise that it had a fairly rough ride in another place. I congratulate my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Blatch on the way in which she handled the Bill and carried it forward in another place and on her letter of 19 November that set out very clearly the progress that had been made in doing so.

I certainly welcome the Bill. I welcome the new role of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the introduction of a National Crime Squad, which will pull together the regional crime squads that have operated so effectively. I share the view that I know is held by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, and I suspect many others on both sides of the House, that we do not want to create a Federal Bureau of Investigation or a national police force. Local policing is one of our great prizes in law and order, and we should hang on to it as much as possible. As we face the threats and increased mobility of criminals and terrorists, however, national co-ordination will be essential. The Bill addresses that, and I shall return to it in a moment. Before doing so, I want to say a word or two about part V, to which the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred towards the end of his speech.

I certainly welcome the proposal for a criminal records agency. I am sure that, in time, it will be widely accepted. However, many voluntary organisations still have some concern about the impact of the cost of differing certificates on the volunteers or trainers and the organisations that use their services. It is obviously immensely important that organisations ensure that, where financial matters are particularly sensitive or where people are responsible for children, young people, vulnerable, elderly, disabled or confused people, those who are employed in a paid or voluntary capacity are properly checked out and those organisations are able to establish their credentials before they take on the employment. Such a system is needed and can be of immense value.

We are told that the charges will be of the order of £5 to £6, or perhaps £8 to £10 for more sophisticated certificates. At first, I was hostile altogether to charging for such services. I have recently received a representation from the Central Council of Physical Recreation, which made a good argument against charges and said that it regarded them as a tax on volunteering and training. I am not sure whether I agree with that. I certainly understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary would be loth to ask his Treasury colleagues for £200 million to remove any impact of charging on volunteers or the organisations concerned. However, I hope that he will be able to monitor the effects of charges on volunteering and the employment of people in such organisations. I want charging to be regarded not as a tax on volunteering but as a proper opportunity for people to be able to establish their credentials for a modest charge.

I return to the larger issue that is central to the Bill: intrusive surveillance. At first sight, it is not an attractive concept but, sadly, I regard it, as I suspect do most in the House, as extremely necessary. I first became conscious of the issue when I was the parliamentary private secretary to the former Home Secretary, my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Carr. I remember the assiduity with which he dealt with representations from the intelligence services in passing the necessary warrants for surveillance of one sort or another. I also became conscious during my four years as Minister with responsibility for security in the Northern Ireland Office of how important surveillance was and how, frequently, it was important that such surveillance could be instituted immediately and some big, cumbersome procedure did not have to be undergone to bring about the necessary results.

Our task is to make it possible for the security forces—the police and other law enforcement agencies—to take speedy action to frustrate or apprehend those who are involved in crime or terrorism. I know of the immense responsibility resting on those who have duties in that sensitive area. The Bill meets the need for balance. The phrase "an Englishman's home is his castle", which has been used in this debate, remains an important part of our approach to society, but, sadly and all too frequently, there may be no other way in which information necessary to frustrate the aims of criminals and terrorists can be obtained but by surveillance.

The Bill's provisions and the establishment of the new roles for the two agencies will be of real and practical benefit to the police and other law enforcement agencies.

[Sir Nicholas Scott]

At the end of the day, we are seeking to underpin the efforts of the law enforcement agencies on behalf of our citizens. It is right that we should do so, although we must of course put such provisions on a proper statutory basis, which is what we are about in the Bill. We may be able to learn rather more when the elusive code comes before us and perhaps has to be amended, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has mentioned.

Intelligence is clearly vital as we face rising serious crime levels and the return of a terrorist threat. Increasingly, there is interaction between the two. Kidnapping, drugs, fraud, counterfeiting, vehicle and other serious crime often overlap with terrorist activity. If we are to frustrate the aims of such criminal activity, we shall have to get our act together. The Bill is an important step forward in that regard.

I welcome the change in the role of the NCIS. It was interesting to look at some statistics on the apprehension of sophisticated criminals over the past year. It looks as though about 26 arrests of serious criminals have taken place week by week in that time. We must congratulate the law enforcement agencies on that, but recognise that we need to improve in future. The bodies in the Bill will do much to counter increasing criminal and terrorist activity. Although local policing is, as I have said, absolutely vital and part of our heritage, we need a national strategy for such policing, and the Bill provides that foundation.

Obviously, accountability will be important. The chief constables and the commissioners who will consider applications for surveillance must be prepared to operate under codes of practice to ensure that their actions are commensurate with the real threat that is posed to our society. Those codes of practice should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. The Bill is necessary, and I commend my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for its introduction.

6.9 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'this House believes that the Police Bill *[Lords]* is not an acceptable and effective measure unless the bugging of private places by the police is made fully subject to prior judicial authorisation; unless the power to require job applicants to produce a criminal conviction certificate is limited to posts for which there is a reasonable justification for such a certificate; and unless the service authorities for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad are made up primarily of members of local police authorities.'

Our amendment sets out our concerns about three key areas of the Bill; the bugging provisions, the general criminal conviction certificate provisions—the wide nature of which will lead to a significant change in the rights of our citizens—and the excessive centralisation of the governing bodies of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad.

I am on record as supporting the need for a Bill on those issues. During the discussions that preceded the introduction of the Security Service Act 1996, I argued strongly for such a Bill. The Intelligence and Security Committee, of which I am a member, reported on the need for legislation. It would have been logical for the Bill to be introduced at the same time as, or even before, the Security Service Act 1996. It is necessary to put bodies of the significance of NCIS and the National Crime Squad—which the Prime Minister announced nearly two years ago would be created from the regional crime squads—on a statutory footing.

It is also necessary to do something about the unauthorised, and in many respects illegal, bugging activities carried out by the police for many years, in the absence of any statutory power. They carried out the bugging to detect crime, in parallel with the use of powers by the security services, which had a proper authorisation procedure. When the two services began to work together on organised crime, the illogicality became obvious.

The powers on bugging are necessary, because they can be crucial in dealing with certain crimes, but safeguards are equally necessary. In the recent NCIS investigation, carried out by the chief constable of Northumbria, it became clear that nearly 1,000 records of telephone intercepts had gone missing. Their removal had not been recorded and they could not be traced. In that case, powers were not abused, but the carelessness and lack of proper procedures meant that rights were not safeguarded as they should have been. That case should be a warning to us as we consider the provisions on bugging.

The law has a serious gap, because it does not protect citizens against surveillance by others. Intrusive surveillance can be and is carried out by people who have less justification for doing so than the police. We are not adequately protected against that. The Government have promised in the past to take action, but they have not done so. It would be understandable for the police to be concerned that their use of the powers to bug in the detection of serious crime is being scrutinised carefully, while other more dubious people make use of the same technology to eavesdrop on people without justification. Equipment for the purpose is widely available in shops.

When the Bill was introduced, it was a great disappointment to people who thought it should include prior authorisation that paralleled the system that applied to the security services. From the beginning, there appeared to be an agreement between the Home Secretary and his Labour shadow. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) seemed satisfied that subsequent review would be sufficient. Of course, it is an improvement for bugging to have a legal basis and for applications to bug to be reviewed by commissions, but that is not an adequate substitute for prior authorisation of intrusion into private places. That is the essence of the Bill. The phrase "an Englishman's home is his castle" has been used, and we are talking about intrusion into places that people legitimately regard as private.

In another place, my noble Friend Lord Rodgers provided firm opposition. We have cause to be grateful to him, because I do not believe that the Labour party would otherwise have adopted its present view. In the end, of course, the Labour Front Benchers were also influenced by the views of many of their own peers. Many Labour Members in the other place voted for our amendment, and others were actively involved in persuading the hon. Member for Blackburn that his original position was not acceptable.

Mr. Budgen: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the most disagreeable features of modern politics

is the way in which new Labour has tried to become more authoritarian than the Tory party? Its policy appears to be that, if the Tories are in favour of kicking a beggar once, new Labour is in favour of kicking a beggar twice. As a result, the official Opposition have not done their job on the Bill. Is that not an additional argument for insisting that the provisions on prior authorisation are considered on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Beith: Perhaps unusually, I agree with both parts of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. There is a dangerous closeness between the Home Secretary and his shadow, and both are under criticism from within their parties. Speaking as a Liberal Democrat, I welcome the different views that have been vigorously expressed in both the other parties. I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that part III should be taken on the Floor of the House, because it involves major constitutional issues.

In another place, we argued that entry into a private place to carry out intrusive surveillance should require prior authorisation by a judge. In England and Wales, circuit judges would be appropriate and convenient, because they are available in all police areas. We are not persuaded that authorisation should be given by a judge who also serves as a member of the body of commissioners which subsequently reviews the authorisation. That is a fundamental weakness in the approach of the Government and the Labour party. Those who give the permission will subsequently review whether it was given satisfactorily. That does not make sense.

Mr. Straw: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not wish to mislead the House, but he was incorrect in what he said about the Lords amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats, which did not confine prior approval arrangements to premises. It covered any surveillance operation.

Mr. Beith: The Labour amendment did not restrict the provisions to private residences: it would also apply them to the Arthur Daley warehouse which, as I shall shortly argue, need not be covered by the prior authorisation procedure. It ill behoves those who thought that no prior authorisation was necessary to criticise the details of the prior authorisation that we suggested.

It is a mistake to give the review body the initial power of approval, and that must be reconsidered. Chief police officers believe that a central unit for processing applications is desirable, and I understand that, but that would not require the approving judges to act as commissioners. The central unit could use a different panel of judges.

Nobody has explained so far what will happen in Scotland. Is it assumed that one of the commissioners will be a Scottish judge? Is it assumed that there will be a unit in Edinburgh to process applications, or will all Scottish police forces have to apply to London for an authorisation? Scottish police officers are very concerned about those questions.

The procedures set up by the Bill must be capable of being implemented rapidly in emergencies, to avoid recourse to retrospective approval, which is undesirable and is not thought necessary for the powers under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 or the Security Service Act 1996. The Security Service deals with situations which, in the way that they must be handled, are not dissimilar to those with which the police deal. The Security Service must apply to the Home Secretary for authorisation. If the application is urgent, the Home Secretary has to act urgently. It is a job that he does not delegate to a junior Minister, and if he is out of the country, it is done by another Secretary of State, but it is done urgently, and there is no reason why a judge cannot do that job urgently.

Nobody has so far suggested that it is necessary to bypass the procedure of recourse to the Home Secretary, either for the Security Service or for police use of the interception of communications legislation. They have recourse to the Home Secretary for approval in such cases, and there is not an emergency bypass. The suggestion that this cannot be done in cases where there is an intrusion into a private residence—which must be mounted before the person returns to that residence—does not stand up. Even if it were to prove persuasive to the House, it must be more narrowly defined than "cases of urgency". That is the blandest definition we could have, but it has found approval with both the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Blackburn.

The provisions of the Bill extend to a far wider range of surveillance activities than have been featured in the public debate. These include measures to locate and track vehicles, the surveillance of lock-up warehouses—which may be used to tranship weapons or drugs—and surveillance in a public place. We accept that some of these activities—although they should be reviewed by commissioners—need not require prior authorisation on the same basis as the bugging of a private residence.

Another interesting case is that of the confessional. The Home Secretary looked as if he were about to be drawn into some theological difficulty over this issue, and the status of the assurance he gave was not clear. It was said that the police would not use the powers in relation to what was described as "the seal of the confessional". In the first place, it is not clear how the Home Secretary can give that assurance for every police force which may make applications. Secondly, it is not clear how that will affect other groups which, theologically, do not accept the concept of the confessional and a priest giving absolution, but have similarly confidential discussions between a member of the congregation and the minister—whether it is a Protestant minister, a rabbi or someone else in a similar position.

It is not clear whether the Home Secretary intends that these powers could never be used, even with prior judicial authorisation, although there might be a case for doing so. My mind goes back to a Catholic priest in Ireland, who was found to be involved in gun-running activities. I regard that as an exceptional case, but one that might justify prior authorisation for use of the powers. There is an area of confusion that will have to be sorted out, and the solution cannot depend on one's willingness to accept only a Catholic doctrine of confession. It would be an odd piece of legislation if it were so based.

I do not believe that the deal between the Home Secretary and his Labour shadow, the hon. Member for Blackburn, will do. We must return to the bugging powers on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Allason: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, before the Security Services Act 1989 and, indeed,

[Mr. Allason]

since then, any electronic surveillance conducted by the police was not illegal, as he suggested, and that, provided that it was authorised by a chief police officer, it was entirely legal? Secondly, does he accept that any private enterprise bugging—as he describes it—is completely illegal as it is a breach of the wireless and telegraphy legislation? Finally, does he accept that there is a huge difference between the kind of electronic surveillance undertaken by the Security Service, where those involved are intelligence officers, and that used by the police, whose officers are part of a uniformed and disciplined organisation with a direct structure of accountability and discipline?

Mr. Beith: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman is trying to argue with his last point, but he is wrong if he assumes that all surveillance and eavesdropping activities—or even interception activities—are legal. The law is far from complete on this point. The Home Secretary conceded that, in the controversial case of Alison Halford—the former assistant chief constable of Merseyside—the chief constable intercepted communications on a telephone in the assistant chief constable's office, but was not acting illegally and did not require authorisation when he did so.

Mr. Budgen: Does the right hon. Gentleman concede that the bugging done in the past by the police was not illegal? The police have, very honourably, come to the Government and said that they think that what they are doing could be subject to criticism in the future, and that they would like a proper statutory framework for those activities. Is it not most unfortunate that the Government are not giving the police the opportunity to have this matter fully debated on the Floor of the House? There have been doubts about the police's behaviour in the past—in the west midlands, for instance, where the serious crime squad had to be disbanded. Would it not be better to have a more public debate on the details, which have so engaged the interest of the House, on the Floor? Is it not inevitably unfair to everybody concerned to have the debate tucked away in Committee?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman believes in the merit of repetition, as I have already answered his last question in the affirmative. However, it must be said that the police were in danger of facing criminal charges, and certainly actions for civil trespass, for some of the actions that they might have had to take in carrying out those duties. It is true that they have been among those seeking a proper statutory basis, and it is right that the Home Secretary has responded to that—although it would have been better to do so when we were dealing with the Security Service legislation.

Another major issue in the Bill that has not received sufficient public attention because of the concentration on the bugging issue is the criminal conviction certificates. We accept the case for special certificates which will be required for special categories of work—especially work with vulnerable people such as children, where the enhanced criminal record certificate will apply. There will have to be safeguards, as situations could arise in which someone who is wrongly listed is blackballed from work because of an error. We have all seen constituency cases of mistakes made by the Child Support Agency, and if that were to be transported to this sector, it would have catastrophic consequences.

We are concerned about the Government's attitude to the Lords amendment relating to charities. It will not do to take the power to remit the costs and do nothing about it, as that would raise entirely false expectations. The Government are imposing a large burden on charities, voluntary organisations and those who work for them. A former Speaker of this House took up that cause in another place, with widespread support, and the Government must give a better response.

We have a particular concern about the general criminal conviction certificates which, potentially, will be required for any job anywhere at any time. It is a fundamental change to the position of our citizens if they are to find in future that they will not be able to pursue an application for any job of any description unless they obtain such a certificate. They may have no reason to worry about it, but may still have to pay for the certificate and may not wish to do so. Others may have had criminal convictions in the past which they have put behind them and which are entirely irrelevant to their attempt to obtain employment now.

It is clear that those in a fiduciary position as trustees of charities or directors of companies will increasingly feel that they had better ask for those certificates in case someone should one day take money out of the till and for it to emerge that the company did not ask for certificates, which would have shown previous convictions. The measure will spread and become more general. It will create particular problems in some areas—for example, where an informer has been relocated, perhaps from Northern Ireland, with a new identity. If he goes to seek another job, he must produce a criminal conviction certificate. How will he do that without disclosing precisely the information that he must conceal if he is to be protected? He will have been given that protection because of the service he rendered, enabling the police to track down, arrest and convict other terrorists or dangerous.

My noble Friend Lord Rodgers made a significant point in another place, when he asked why, if everyone else in the country will be required to produce a criminal conviction certificate, Members of Parliament should not have to do so. Why are we prepared to lay on other people a responsibility that we do not accept ourselves? Why should we not have to lodge with the returning officer when we put in our nomination a criminal conviction certificate that is open to inspection by any member of the public? It seems perfectly reasonable that we should do what we expect everyone else to do. If we are prepared to place that responsibility on everyone else in society, we cannot shy away from it ourselves.

My fear, and that of many organisations working for the rehabilitation of offenders, is that we will set back that rehabilitation, especially for those who commit one or two offences at a young age and then go straight. A third of men under 30 have a criminal conviction—I still find that figure astonishing and hard to believe, but it is constantly produced by the most reputable bodies—and they would have that recorded on the certificate. That is a matter for deep concern.

The composition of the authorities that will be responsible for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad is too heavily weighted towards the Home Office, which will appoint the chairmen of those bodies.

There is also concern about the disciplinary arrangements for police officers seconded to NCIS and the regional crime squads. It is unsatisfactory that, at present, the management of NCIS has no disciplinary responsibility; nobody works for the head of NCIS, as the officers are all seconded and subject to somebody else's discipline. They are disciplined only in their home forces.

The Bill provides for a double discipline procedure: while seconded, the officer will be subject to a separate discipline code that will apply also to non-police officers working for NCIS. When the officer goes back to the home force, he or she will be back in the normal police disciplinary code. The Police Federation understandably has concerns about that; those concerns will have to be addressed. Such matters could be considered upstairs in Committee, but I agree that part III, the bugging part, would be better dealt with on the Floor of the House.

We shall vote for our reasoned amendment tonight. Someone had to take a firm stand. The Labour leadership certainly did not do so until goaded by our amendment and by others. If people do not take firm stands about essential civil liberties, those liberties will be eroded.

6.31 pm

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): I am not persuaded to support the amendment, but the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has once again put very cogently some important points that will have to be considered with the greatest care as the Bill proceeds towards enactment.

I agreed with a great deal of what the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said. As he in turn agreed with a great deal of what the Home Secretary said, I am glad to find myself agreeing in considerable measure with my right hon. and learned Friend.

The developments proposed in the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the formation of the police information technology organisation and the National Crime Squad are welcome. I am sure that they will increase the effectiveness of the police in dealing with crime, and especially major organised crime, which requires a national and international response.

There is great scope for improving police strategy and tactics for the solving and preventing of crime. There has been a welcome fall in reported crime, in which the Home Secretary rightly takes pride. The success of Operation Bumblebee is well known, and I am sure that the fall in reported crime owes more to the thorough use of police resources in terms of intelligence and information, the cumulative effect of programmes such as the "Safe City" programme, and the judicious use of closed circuit television, than it does to longer prison sentences—but that is probably another debate.

Intelligence is crucial. That is why the police information technology organisation is vital for collecting, matching and processing relevant data and enabling them to be retrieved efficiently when needed. Serious criminals are using every scientific device and refinement of technology. If the police are to keep ahead, they must do so too. They must be able to collect hard-to-get information if they are to track down the drug barons and godfathers and the other criminals who are skilled in not leaving their fingerprints behind.

Bugging and electronic eavesdropping are, alas, essential. Their use by both police and criminals is bound to increase and to become ever more sophisticated and more frequent, so we must take extra care that, in our efforts to catch criminals, the traditional liberties and rights of the public are protected—especially their privacy at home and in their place of work.

The police have always had a policy of respecting those traditional liberties and rights, but we nevertheless require them to apply to a judge or a magistrate for a warrant before entering or searching private property, and to get permission from the Home Secretary before tapping a telephone.

It would clearly have been wrong, when putting bugging on a proper statutory footing, for prior authorisation not to be required as it is for the other two procedures. A bug under the dining room table is as intrusive as the telephone being tapped, if not more so. I am glad that the Home Secretary has been persuaded of that. When I first heard that he intended to table a new amendment, I was told that he wanted to require prior authorisation for the bugging of doctors, lawyers and journalists only. That would have been unacceptable. I do not see why the editors of *The Sun* should have greater protection than their readers or the people about whom they write.

If I understand the Home Secretary correctly, he will require pre-authorisation before anyone can be bugged at home or at work. The Liberal party, in particular, has asked about other places, and I am sure that we should consider such matters in Committee or, if time permits, on the Floor of the House. If I have understood my right hon. and learned Friend correctly, he is to be congratulated. Nobody believes that the police want to misuse their power to bug, but it is best, when they need to intrude clandestinely—immersed as they are in fighting crime—that they are not the judges in their own case. Pre-authorisation is a useful discipline on the police and a necessary safeguard for the individual citizen.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): When the police gave evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee in our inquiry into organised crime, it was—

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I apologise, Madam Speaker. Perhaps my right hon. Friend would allow me to draw to his attention the fact—[HON. MEMBERS: "Now you have stepped over the line."] I am sorry, Madam Speaker, that I have put a foot wrong. It is the first time that I have put a foot wrong in 23 years.

The police suggested to the Select Committee that their bugging powers should be put on a proper statutory basis; the suggestion came from them.

Sir Peter Lloyd: Yes, I am quite sure that it did, although I am not so sure that they pressed hard for pre-authorisation. However, I am certain that thoughtful police officers will agree that there is much benefit in it for themselves: it is a protection for them as well as for the public.

As I was saying to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, I am sure that, as the Bill proceeds, we shall need to consider carefully how the new arrangements will work, and how to make sure that the safeguards are as strong and as comprehensive as they should be.

[Sir Peter Lloyd]

I am concerned that charities, especially those that serve vulnerable people such as children and the elderly, will be heavily penalised if the amendment made in the House of Lords is overturned as the Home Secretary suggested. At present, such organisations can have the necessary checks carried out at no cost, but if that amendment is deleted they will have to find a large sum out of limited budgets, or charge their volunteers. It would be possible for a number of volunteers to pay. Many may do so, but a lot will be deterred, and quite a number—particularly the unemployed and other people on limited incomes, whom one wants to encourage—will find it difficult, if not impossible.

I hope that that matter will be reconsidered, despite what my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said. I do not like putting extra costs on the Treasury. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why I am on the Conservative side of the House. A surcharge on certificates provided at the request of businesses or public sector organisations could bridge the gap, perhaps. I am sorry that my right hon. and learned Friend appeared to reject any change here and now. Simply to excise the Lord's amendment is not the right answer.

On crime checks generally, I would register but not develop the concern that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) so cogently expressed. I hope that we are not developing into a society in which we all as a matter of course have to have a crime check clearance from the police before we can get a job or some other service, or exercise some other right. It is not an attractive prospect, but it might be coming.

As the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, perhaps we can turn this Bill into an opportunity to help offenders back into work. As chairman of the only charity I know that runs a job-finding service for ex-prisoners, I wholeheartedly support that hope. A job is the best way to ensure that an ex-prisoner does not become a prisoner again—the best way for him and the best way to protect society. I hope that we can make progress on that suggestion before we return to the Bill on the Floor of the House. It is important that it is looked into. This may be an opportunity to turn what looks like a negative for ex-offenders into a positive.

6.41 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I am opposed to the Bill. I shall vote for the Liberal Democrat amendment and, if there is a Division on Second Reading, I shall go into the No Lobby. I shall tell the House very simply why.

Recently, 51 Members of Parliament signed an early-day motion that I put down, which stated:

"That this House wishes to express its grave anxiety about the Police Bill, which contains provisions that would seriously erode traditional civil liberties in Britain; and invites Her Majesty's Government to re-consider this proposed legislation."

It could not have been put more moderately, and there was support from hon. Members from parties other than my own. I am glad that the Liberal Democrat amendment has been tabled. At least that is a guarantee that we shall have a vote.

I have three objections to the Bill. First, the intelligence gathering will be indiscriminate. People must be naive if they imagine that the police will not put on that computer every bit of information that they can find as a by-product of other investigations and any information that tells them something about solicitors they do not like as they may be working with criminals in other cases—integrating health and medical records and God knows what. If anyone doubts that, they should look at the comprehensive computer system that the Labour party has developed at Millbank, which is known as Excalibur and which has everything ever said by a Conservative Minister in the past 200 years available for immediate recall.

Knowing the police, they will put everything down that they can pick up—much of it inaccurate. Much of the information could easily be inaccurate, particularly if it is kept secret. Also, under clause 2(4)(a), that intelligence service is subject to objectives set down by the Home Secretary, who can tell it what to do. In the world of information gathering anyone must be naive if they think that anything that comes as a by-product of another investigation would immediately be dismissed by the police or that they would say, "Nothing to do with us. We must destroy it at once."

The measure will result in a building up of dossiers. Hon. Members know about the gross inaccuracies in the information held by the Child Support Agency. I know of many cases. Anyone who thinks that one can build up an accurate information service in five minutes without any proper accountability has made a mistake.

My second objection is to the intrusive surveillance—bugging and burgling. The third relates to the criminal certificates, which are cleverly drafted. The Home Secretary did not answer my question. If I want a job, an employer can ask me to produce a certificate, but if an employer offers me a job, I cannot say, "I will not take it unless you give me a criminal conviction certificate." So the measure weighs for capital against Labour, to use the jargon that is now perhaps forgotten but still relevant. Supposing Robert Maxwell had offered me a job and I was unemployed—

Mr. Beith: He offered several people jobs.

Mr. Benn: He did not offer me one, thank God. Let us suppose that I said, "I'd very much like to work with you, Mr. Maxwell. Could you please persuade me that you have not had any convictions?" He would not have had to reply. If I then went back to the job centre and said that I was offered a job but would not take it because he would not prove that he was not a convicted person, would I continue to get my benefit? Of course I would not. So, the provision is grossly unfair and I will return to its other uses.

We have all heard the background to the Bill a million times. We all read the newspapers and watch television. There is terrorism, drug dealing, the Mafia, triads and all the rest. Crime is high-tech and globally organised, but clause 92(5)(a) includes among the people who can be surveyed

"conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose".

That has nothing to do with terrorism, drug dealing or crime.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Benn: I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not misunderstand me. I do not know whether he followed

the debate in the House of Lords. I do not usually follow those debates, but I found it much better than I had expected on this issue.

When Jim Callaghan was asked, he said that he never knew about all the intrusions, and when he was given the figures, he said, "Those were industrial disputes." That is what the Bill is about. At the heart of the Bill—all covered up to make it look as if we are going to fight terrorism—is a power that the Government can use against anyone they do not like, so long as two or three are gathered together. That has a biblical significance, which is bringing the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) to his feet.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I do not know what Mr. Callaghan said, but he was a party to the telephone bugging of my home, and he asked for the reports from the police. He got reports from them on tapes taken from my home, so he knew what was going on.

Mr. Benn: We should not reminisce, but I am coming to my experiences, too. The fact of the matter is that companies are also

"a number of people engaged in a common purpose".

Any Home Secretary could arrange for the bugging of any company for any reason. Imagine if a left-wing Government were in power. How would the Conservative party react to powers that we took that allowed us to bug and burgle any company that we thought might be engaged in any conduct that could threaten a particular political interest of ours?

The police could bug and burgle and do all this—with advance judicial permission, if there was time. Everyone knows that, if it was a case of kidnapping, one might ring up the commissioner on the way. That is not the problem. It is the fact that it extends to the large number of people engaged in a common purpose. That is the politics at the heart of what is otherwise a police Bill.

I did not know until I heard the question that some people do not realise that confidential relations between Christian ministers and their flock are not confined to the Catholic Church. The Bill does not say that Christian ministers cannot be bugged—or barristers, journalists, solicitors and doctors. The commissioner would be asked, if there were time. Under what circumstances could it be so urgent to bug a barrister that one did not have time to ring the judge, particularly as the police have to ask the barrister for the information first to qualify for the right to intervene? The thing is absurd and all the information collected will be stored on the National Criminal Intelligence Service computer.

The argument was that that has always been done. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn said that, too. I do not need to be told that. I was bugged and burgled as a Cabinet Minister. My son, who was an electronics buff, established that that happened while I was a Cabinet Minister.

My waste sacks were collected every day in a Rover car. I know that Kensington borough council is proud of its services, but I have never heard of someone having his rubbish removed every morning. My son fitted a little bell. We called it the rubbish bell. We used to watch the rubbish go every morning. I wrote to Merlyn Rees, the Home Secretary, asking whether my phone was bugged. I did not get a reply; perhaps he did not get the letter. I wrote again and, I think, a third time and did not get a reply. Then I went to see Jim Callaghan. He said gruffly, "Why are you asking all these questions?" I said, "I would quite like to know. I am a member of the Cabinet." He said, "I can tell you it is not happening now." He did not say whether it had happened before or might happen again. I have read it all in "Spycatcher". The Government spent millions of pounds trying to stop me reading a book that confirmed what I knew to be true, and then they say that they want more openness.

If things that were done before by administrative action are to be put on a statutory basis, what about a Bill to allow Ministers to lie? That has happened in the House. I can imagine a Ministerial Statements (Amendment) Bill to allow Ministers to lie in the House on the grounds that they have always lied, or at least that some have always lied. It is not a sustainable argument.

In the old days, those who talked about being bugged were described as paranoid; nowadays, people say, "What's new?" Both attitudes are wrong. We should not be regarded as paranoid if we know it is happening, and it should not be regarded as normal because everyone does it. Civil liberties protect our society. Dissent protects our society. We never know which dissenter is going to be right. The Pope put Galileo in prison for heresy because he had the dangerous idea that the universe did not go round the earth. I visited his cell. Until recently, I used to feel worried watching Patrick Moore on television because the Pope had said that that was heresy. Fortunately, the Pope has let Galileo off, although it was a bit late to help him.

Democracy is about the growth of dissent until it can persuade a minority to become a majority. I am not alone. Sometimes when I make such points, I am alone, but feel that I must stick to my guns. However, this time I have Lord Carr, Lord Jenkins, Lord Callaghan and Lord Merlyn-Rees, who are all critics of this Bill. That is four Home Secretaries, none of whom is subject to the electoral temptations of 1 May. That is why they were able to do it. It tells us much about the Front-Bench teams that 1 May looms larger than Sir Edward Coke's famous judgment that

"every man's house is his castle".

Those Home Secretaries opposed terrorism, but they did not what know what was going on. Lord Carr did not know, nor Merlyn Rees, nor Jim Callaghan; neither does the present Home Secretary; and nor will the future Home Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), know what the police are doing. Read Peter Wright. He said that he had bugged and burgled his way around London while the people at the top turned their backs.

Let us be realistic. The Bill has been attacked by Lord Rees-Mogg, the *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Observer*, *The Sunday Times*, the *New York Times*. The *Evening Standard* called it "disgraceful." It has been attacked by Alison Halford, the former deputy chief constable who was bugged by her chief constable when she brought a sex discrimination case; by Peter Carter-Ruck, the Law Society, Liberty and the former Attorney-General, Lord Rawlinson, whom I knew well.

There is also the criminal convictions certificate, which, as I said, can be required by employers but not from them. If I wanted an enhanced certificate, I would have to be

[Mr. Benn]

fingerprinted to get one. That is in the Bill. Even if we did have to provide such a certificate to be elected to Parliament, as far as I know, my record is clear. There may be a mistake in the police computer that I cannot explain but if I wanted proof, I would have to be fingerprinted.

If that is not a police state, I should like to know what is. If we really want to deal with all the criminal problems, we should tattoo everyone with a national number and put an electronic device under their skin. Then we will know where everyone is all the time and there will not be any problems. Leaving aside the politics, there is a conflict between fighting crime and maintaining civil liberties.

We will create a new underclass of unemployable people with convictions. One third of men under 35 have convictions. A third of women in prison are there for non-payment of television licences. I have never forgotten a case that I had when I represented Bristol. A woman came to see me in a terrible state. Her husband had died, she was 55 and she had applied for a job in a supermarket. The security officer asked whether she had any convictions. She said no. He was an ex-policeman, and he rang the police, who told him that she had been picked up for something when she was 15. He confronted her with that 40-year-old offence. She had a nervous breakdown. I got a letter of apology from the chief constable in Bristol and from the Home Secretary. If we open such prospects, we will create unemployable people whose only chance of rehabilitation would have been finding other work.

This is not a left-right issue. Interestingly, it divides the Executive, both present and future, from the legislature. I appeal across the Floor to people who might not otherwise agree with my views. This is a Bill that Brezhnev operated. No doubt Milosevic finds it useful in Belgrade. Probably the Albanians will try to copy it in view of their difficulties with pyramid selling. It is not a Bill that a serious democratic Parliament should pass.

Where is the demand for the Bill? Does middle England want it? Has a middle-class focus group made up of barristers, lawyers and priests said, "We must be bugged more often to safeguard us from terrorism." Of course not. The Bill comes from those who want more power over the people of Britain. Libertarians should resist it. It is part of a pattern. I do not want to go back over all the legislation, but, over the years, we have lost many of our liberties.

I went down to Dover to support the animal rights people. There was an argument between a policeman and one demonstrator in an empty street. I went over asked the constable what was wrong. He said, "That man is standing in a part of this town I have not designated for protest." I asked whether a member for Kent constabulary could designate any part of Kent. He said, "Yes, I can." I asked what the problem was. He said that the street could not be blocked. I said that it was a huge street and that no one was there. He went to have a word with an inspector. Do not think that we are not losing our civil liberties. We are transferring the protection of our rights from Parliament to the police.

I mention Europe because, without reopening the difficult question of the single currency, everyone knows that we have a developing relationship on terrorism and crime with European Governments. They will want access and we will give it to them from everything that we have on our computers. It is happening already. If a German comes to Britain to work and the employer asks for a criminal conviction certificate, he will say, "We do not have them in Germany." What will happen then to the level playing field? The whole thing will be handed to European control.

Every society requires a huge amount of consent to survive, and an element of coercion. There are criminal classes and people who have to be coerced. The Bill reflects a deep anxiety in the British establishment about the future. When you were elected, Madam Speaker, I said that I thought that there would be social unrest in the years ahead. I was interrupted for saying it, but I believe it.

The Bill is an instrument for getting greater coercive powers over people. I hope that the House will reject it as do people of all political opinions. I would be a libertarian with those among Conservative Members if they would only drop the economic nonsense. On true libertarianism—protecting people from having their lives controlled by others—I would be with them. I hope that the House will not accept the Bill.

6.58 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): In a moment of unusual ecumenism, I hope that I will be forgiven for not commenting adversely on the unreality of the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). He is my pair and no one could admire him more than I, or be more grateful for all that he has done for the House. Hon. Members should also be grateful for his sparing them from having to listen to more speeches from me than they might otherwise have to hear, and he should be rewarded for that. However, I hope that he will forgive me for taking a little less than seriously his condemnation of the police for surreptitiously recording and disseminating private conversations. Many of us are beginning to develop a long section in our library dedicated to his privately recorded and disseminated conversations, which are immensely amusing—long may they continue.

Mr. Benn: I dictate my diary and I record my speeches, but I am not a bugger and I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will acquit me of that, lest it go on my criminal record.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: No one could possibly accuse the right hon. Gentleman of doing anything so uncouth, because he is the epitome of charm and decency.

In another brief moment of ecumenicalism, I should like to say how much I enjoyed the comments of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) about the absurdity of the Liberal Democrats' proposals for the amendment of the Bill. I shall not add to the embarrassment of another right hon. Member for whom I have the utmost regard, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), by attacking his attempt to justify the ridiculous. He was probably embarrassed enough by having to put forward the arguments in his speech. The Liberal Democrats will learn what the rest of the House thinks of their proposals when we go through the Lobbies later tonight.

There, I am afraid, my ecumenism must end. The hon. Member for Blackburn began his speech by mentioning that recorded crime had more than doubled, which is true.

He might have added that that has happened practically everywhere in the western world during the same period. He might also have said that recorded crime will inevitably rise in a prosperous society where nearly everyone now has a telephone and can quickly communicate with the police; where most people now possess cars, which never used to be the case; where houses are now empty for so much longer as more and more families go out to work and are therefore more available for easy pickings by burglars; and where one cannot make a claim against an insurance policy unless the matter has first been reported to the police, which is a more recent development. Finally, as a result of the response to victims and the increasing concern for them that the criminal justice system has shown in recent years, more and more women who are the subject of violence in their houses are reporting those incidents to the police. Those factors explain a fair amount of the increase in recorded crime.

In addition, the hon. Gentleman did not say, although he might have been expected to do so, that, notwithstanding all that, the Government have reduced crime by 10 per cent. over the past three years, which is the largest, fastest and longest reduction in crime since records started to be kept in the middle of the 19th century. It would have been fairer of him had he reminded his viewers and listeners of that, but perhaps it would have been too difficult for him to draw attention to the Government's success so close to a general election.

I was also interested in the exchange between my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for Blackburn on the subject of the surrender of power by a possible—albeit unlikely—Labour Government. The Government have always considered impregnable the third pillar issues of justice and home affairs, which are specifically exempted from Maastricht and over which we have the complete veto—they are not even within the competence of the European Community.

The right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was reported in the *Financial Times* of 29 January as saying:

> "He hints at a concession, however, by suggesting that some justice and home affairs issues, such as police co-operation (but definitely not frontier or domestic criminal law) might be 'unbundled' and 'partially communitised', allowing the European parliament and court of justice to have a say in them."

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I shall just finish my point and then it might be easier for the hon. Gentleman to respond.

If an injustice was done earlier by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary—who no doubt wishes to cause no injustice—and if an injustice was done by that newspaper to new Labour, may I ask whether that quotation has ever been denied?

Mr. Michael: Perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman should have listened to the comments of my hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), in which he made the position absolutely clear. Instead of posing questions, will he respond to this point? He read out certain elements as if they were quotations; will he acknowledge that they are not direct quotations from my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the shadow Foreign Secretary, but quotations from an article by a *Financial Times* journalist?

Will the hon. and learned Gentleman also acknowledge that the article makes it absolutely clear—I think that he dropped his voice when he came to this point—that there is definitely no suggestion whatsoever regarding frontier control or domestic criminal law? The words in the article are:

"definitely not frontier control or domestic criminal law".

That is clear in the article, which shows on what tenuous grounds the Home Secretary made his inaccurate and insubstantial claims earlier today. Does the hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge that?

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am not sure how tenuous it is. The words "unbundled" and "partially communitised" are in quotations. The authors are none other than Edward Mortimer and John Kampfner—the first of whom is held in the highest regard, although I cannot claim to know the other gentleman—so one can assume that the reporting is pretty accurate. Whether or not it is accurate, my question is whether there has ever been—until today—a denial. If there has been no denial until today, is not that another example of the wholly disreputable behaviour of the Labour party, whose members tend to say things in private and then deny them when they are made public? As a result, they are all things to all people in the run-up to a general election, which I consider to be an abuse of proper behaviour.

Mr. Michael: It is for you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to decide whether that is abuse of this House. The hon. and learned Gentleman is twisting words in order to try to justify the Home Secretary's earlier remarks when it is clear that the Home Secretary's remarks cannot be justified. Journalists are responsible for the articles they write. There are inverted commas around individual words and phrases, but the article does not make it clear whether they are quotations from anyone or whether they are simply the use of inverted commas by the journalists in regard to specific terms.

It is outrageous for the hon. and learned Gentleman to take his brief from Tory central office in order to try to twist words and throw around accusations and misrepresentations, which are the only actions left to his discredited party in the run-up to the general election. Even in the article, it is absolutely clear that there is definitely no suggestion of any relaxation on the part of the Labour party in regard to frontier control—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Hon. Members know that interventions should, by their nature, be short. I should be grateful if we could now consider the contents of the Bill.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: May I say that I have never seen a hole deeper than the one into which the hon. Gentleman has dug himself? However, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall return to the contents of the Bill.

The bugging issue apart, I should have thought that the Bill's objectives would—and I believe that they do—command the enthusiastic support of all to whom the protection of British citizens from criminals is more important than party political point scoring. The Bill is further evidence of the Government's absolute

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

determination to reduce crime. It achieves that aim by building up our defences against organised serious and international crime through better co-ordination of our crime defence forces and the weaponry that they deploy.

The Bill takes the Security Service Act 1996 a stage further by ensuring that the National Criminal Intelligence Service backs police operations more effectively, and that must be a good thing. It creates a National Crime Squad, which will more effectively co-ordinate a national response to the serious and, unfortunately, growing problem of national and international crime and that is a good thing. It improves the delivery of information technology to police forces through the police information technology organisation and that must be a good thing.

Finally, through the setting up of the criminal records agency, it helps to reduce the likelihood of serious offenders getting jobs in areas where they might be tempted to carry on offending and that, too, must be a good thing. In all those matters, the improvement of the weaponry with which we are able to counter-attack and to defend against serious crime can only be wholeheartedly welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I believe by the country.

Perhaps I might be permitted to add a thank you to the Government for responding so positively to at least four, and possibly 10, of the recommendations that the Home Affairs Select Committee made when we reported on organised crime 18 months ago, and to other recommendations in our report on the private security industry, regarding the criminal records provisions of the Bill. It is always good to record that this cross-party Committee and the witnesses who gave evidence to it are listened to by the Government, and that our recommendations are acted on. It makes our efforts worth while and shows how effective some of the newer democratic institutions of this parliamentary system can be.

Then there is the matter of intrusive surveillance or bugging. That this measure, even in its earlier form, was a distinct improvement on what preceded it cannot be denied. Until that time, intrusive surveillance or bugging was unlawful, or at any rate not lawful, and no doubt many actions were brought against police forces for trespass—because it is hardly burglary—when premises were invaded and no criminal prosecution resulted or succeeded. No doubt settlements were made out of court, costing the taxpayer a lot of money. Any reference to authority was to a chief constable, which is not quite the same thing as to an independent person.

I would merely add, in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd), that not only did the police ask for the practice to be made statutory, they actually suggested to the Home Affairs Select Committee that judges should be brought in to approve.

Sir Peter Lloyd: Good for them.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Very good for them.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary knows, many Conservative Members were unhappy about the way in which the Bill was originally drafted. One does not have to be an anti-establishment, police-bashing anarchist to care about the principle that an Englishman's home is his castle and should be treated as such by the forces of the state as far as is reasonably possible; and one does not have to be a criminal or a troublemaker, or paranoid, to be concerned about the incursion of the Executive into the liberties of the citizen.

In fact, one reason why we are elected to this place is to protect our constituents as citizens from the abuse of power by the Executive, and that includes its agents—the police and other potentially intrusive forces. That is not to say that we do not understand that, in this modern world, there is a proper place for intrusive surveillance or bugging.

Much modern policing depends on good intelligence, and that means information about crime, which must be obtained, if necessary, by the invasion of privacy of suspected offenders. Nearly all thwartings of drug and terrorist crimes in recent years have come about as a result of information and intelligence, often obtained by bugging.

In a letter to Baroness Blatch dated 16 January, the immediate past president of the Association of Chief Police Officers gave an example. He said:

"During a complex, life threatening and fast moving operation, against persons suspected of kidnapping and conspiring to murder individuals for political purposes, an entry was effected into premises and technical surveillance deployed. As a consequence police were able to monitor developments resulting in the apprehension of the perpetrators as they made their way to carry out their attack. In this case the time-scale involved in this critical part of the operation did not exceed 12 hours in total."

A report in *The Times* today, although not directly on the same point, emphasises how important bugging now is:

"The police case against David Howells hung by the vital thread of secret tape-recordings of his conversations with his two boys while they were held in police cells.

Howells had a cast-iron alibi that he was miles from the murder scene, playing in a darts match. But tapes of conversations with his sons confirmed detectives' suspicions of his complicity in a cover-up, if not in the murder itself."

Obviously, a balance must be struck between the liberties of decent, law-abiding members of society, who have a right to be protected against criminals, and the liberties of suspected offenders who may or may not be innocent. Many of us—not only their Lordships in another place or some Opposition Members, but Conservative Members—were of the view that that balance was not being struck. Prior authorisation of intrusion into private property and the protection of privileged meetings between suspects and their lawyers, their doctors and even journalists, would correct that imbalance. I thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for listening to us and introducing those protections into the Bill.

As a result—I control myself enough not to make party political hay while the sun is out—the Bill has the support of the main Opposition party and will, I hope, move speedily to the statute book. My right hon. and learned Friend's explanation of the need for the chiefs of police, who know best about these things, to have responsibility for authorising such operations, makes good sense to me, as do his proposals for high court judges to be commissioners, for a right to appeal to a chief commissioner and for commissioners to serve for a limited period.

Although the challenges to the legislation before us are now at a much lower level of importance than they were a few days ago—and at a much lower decibel level—it is

obvious that, as the Bill passes through Committee, very many issues will need to be clarified or reconsidered. I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for saying earlier that he is already considering amending the code of practice in response to tonight's debate.

I shall briefly mention some of those issues. First, there is anxiety that, although one of the tests for bugging is that the crime should be serious

"conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose",

in clause 91 may not be serious and might be used to stop processions or to stop offences being committed under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 which are hardly very serious. That has been mentioned by several hon. Members on both sides of the House. Perhaps we should consider the substitution of the word "and" at page 35, line 39, for "or", which might satisfy that concern without weakening the Bill unreasonably.

Secondly, the Bar and Law Society are worried that the privileged communications between lawyers and their clients might still be restricted to some extent, although to a lesser extent, by the new provisions. There must be a balance, but perhaps we could consider that further. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary gave us an assurance about the confessional; we might have a similar assurance, perhaps written into the code of practice, concerning the interference with the complete privacy, which simply must exist, between a lawyer and his client. It will not do for anyone to overhear the client speaking to his lawyer about his defence, because then the information could be used in an unfair way at the criminal trial, and injustice may be done.

Thirdly, there is concern about what is meant by the words "an urgent case" on page 35 of the Bill. That would exempt bugging from the limitation of prior authorisation. Obviously, it would be absurd to lose the tracking of a criminal car as a result of the need for prior authorisation, and I believe that the passage that I have read out from Mr. Jim Sharples is evidence of that. However, there are understandable calls for some clarification, if that should be possible, of the scope of that exemption. I hope that we may consider the possibility of dealing with it in the code as the Bill passes through Committee.

Fourthly, there is some anxiety, which has been expressed during the debate, about the waiving of a fee to applicants who are volunteers in scouting or other activities. My right hon. and learned Friend may have a little difficulty in removing the amendment that was introduced in the House of Lords. I must confess that, in its recommendation No. 6 on access to criminal records, the Home Affairs Committee said that the agency should be self-financing. The point is worthy of further consideration, however it may be resolved.

Fifthly, it is obvious that the provisions are complicated. A code of practice will be necessary. The provision in clause 112 that there may be such a code is insufficient. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider substituting "shall be" for "may be"? We will all need such guidance.

Sixthly, the Bill does not envisage transcripts obtained from bugging being used evidentially, only for the purpose of preventing and detecting crime. The House of Lords case of R *v.* Preston, in which I was a party, reaffirmed that the same applies to transcripts of telephone intercepts under the Interception of Communications Act 1985. The time may soon come when it will be difficult to justify the fact that conversations that are recorded can be used to prevent and detect crime, but cannot be used as evidence in a case. We should consider changing the law so that intercepts of communications or bugs yield up evidence of the crime, to help towards the conviction of the serious criminal.

There is a problem relating to disclosure of the sources, but we have been over that in recent legislation, so the problem may have been reasonably well resolved.

Other issues arise, but I shall not burden the House further. They will be raised in Committee. The calls to have the matter debated on the Floor of the House are, in the present circumstances, somewhat unrealistic. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen), for whom I have the highest regard, can serve on that Committee and improve the Bill with his contributions. The Committee meets in public and is recorded.

If we bear in mind the load of important business that still has to be taken on the Floor of the House while this Parliament lasts, and the short time that we will have left to deal with it, by any stretch of our imagination, it would be unrealistic to bring the Bill on to the Floor at the Committee stage, particularly as it will be brought back to the Chamber on Report. We do not want to lose the Bill under any circumstances, so I back the Government on that decision.

This is a good Bill, and a highly desirable one. Now that the major objection to it has been removed, I hope that the House will give the Bill its full support tonight and a speedy passage on to the statute book.

7.22 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) gave a considered speech. I acknowledge his honourable role as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. I agree with some aspects of his speech—for example, the need for lawyers to have privacy in discussions with their clients, and the need to achieve a proper balance between civil liberties and effective policing. However, I do not agree with his conclusion and his final remarks that this is a good Bill. I think that it is a bad Bill; to use kind language, I find it unwise in several parts, and objectionable in other aspects.

Three aspects of the Bill concern me: the arrangements for setting up and enhancing the National Criminal Intelligence Service; the bugging and burglary powers; and the criminal conviction certificates.

First, whatever the Home Secretary says, we are moving ever closer towards a Federal Bureau of Investigation—a national police service. It will have a national intelligence network and, if it is not so already, it will come to be a political force in the land. The Bill helps that process along, and it is going along without a murmur. It should not be allowed to proceed without dissent.

Mr. Michael: I understand the fears that my hon. Friend expresses. I point out that a National Criminal Intelligence Service exists. There is no accountability for it, other than nominally to the Home Office. The Bill

[Mr. Michael]

provides for accountability to representatives of local police authorities and local police forces. There have long been calls for such accountability.

Mr. Cohen: I accept that, but the Bill provides for an enhancement of the powers of NCIS, as I described. That causes me concern, which I want to place on record.

Liberty has sent hon. Members a briefing on that aspect. It refers to the fact that, in 1990, the Home Affairs Committee heard evidence from several agencies that the criminal records provided to the courts and other agencies were inaccurate, incomplete or out of date, or contained extraneous or prejudicial material. Liberty states:

"The risks of inaccuracies and errors must only increase where the information concerned amounts to *intelligence information*, rather than criminal records."

It points out that the powers of the Data Protection Registrar are weak. There are no controls in the Bill on the quality or the content of the information that is to be kept on NCIS computers.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will my hon. Friend accept, first, that I served on the Home Affairs Committee in 1990, and secondly, that Liberty seems to be slightly mistaken? We decided that, for criminal records, a national standardisation process would be a good thing. The question of enhancing intelligence data in terms of criminal records was never considered, and indeed was opposed.

Mr. Cohen: Intelligence data are going on to the NCIS computer by stealth. I quoted Liberty's point about the inaccuracies and inconsistencies that are increasingly finding their way on to the computer system.

Liberty also points out that there is unauthorised informal disclosure of information by serving police officers to third parties. There have been cases in which the law in that respect has been ineffective, and the cases have subsequently been quashed on appeal by the police officers. There is no effective law to stop the misuse of computer data.

Liberty concludes that without proper controls—safeguards for individuals and accountability—

"the risk of injustice to innocent people is high, and those risks increase where it is a *national body* which gathers and retains such information. There is a balance to be maintained between the important duties of the police in preventing and detecting crime and to provide safeguards to ensure that the state does not hold inaccurate information about innocent people, which may have severe consequences for them."

In enhancing the powers of NCIS in the Bill, the Government have not even considered that balance.

The second aspect of the Bill, which has justifiably concerned the House most, relates to the bugging and burglary powers. The case of Entick *v.* Carrington in 1765 enshrined the constitutional principle that the Englishman's home is his castle and cannot be invaded for reasons of state necessity by any state power without a prior warrant from a judge. Law Lords in another place described that as a constitutional principle, and it has been confirmed that the Bill will violate it.

Hon. Members will have received a booklet called "A law too far" by K. D. Ewing and C. A. Gearty of the civil liberties research unit of King's college, London. They quote the three reasons given in that 1765 judgment by Lord Camden and say:

"The intrusion into the individual's property was 'executed against the party, before he was heard or even summoned; and the information as well as the informers were unknown'. Secondly, Lord Camden drew attention to the vagueness of the procedures accompanying the execution of the power, with the search taking place 'in the presence or the absence of the party, as the messengers shall think fit, and without a witness to testify what passes at the time of the transaction'. And thirdly, Lord Camden was concerned that the innocent person was 'as destitute of remedy as the guilty: and the whole transaction . . . so guarded against discovery that if the officer should be disposed to carry of a bank-bill'"—

which means put down a bank bill—

"'he may do it with impunity, since there is no man capable of proving either the taker or the thing taken'."

The language of 1765 might be elaborate, but those two authors say that the reasons given by Lord Camden are as relevant today as they were in 1765.

There should be a principle in relation to Lord Camden's judgment. First, the power to interfere with private property should apply only to serious arrestable offences as defined by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Secondly, there should be prior approval by a judge, preferably a county court judge, who should be required to be satisfied that the degree of intrusion into the privacy of those affected by the surveillance is commensurate with the seriousness of the offence. A circuit judge should always be required to give approval before burglary or bugging of a private home takes place. Thirdly, the Bill should contain a constraint to safeguard professionals, such as solicitors and barristers to whom the hon. and learned Member for Burton referred, as well as doctors, journalists and priests.

I am concerned about the Bill's provisions relating to commissioners. I note that just one commissioner was envisaged, but that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) said that he was pleased to have tabled an amendment to increase the number to three. If it is argued that prior approval could not be obtained because a matter is urgent, a rota of judges would clearly be more appropriate than just three commissioners.

Mr. Michael: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend again, and I am grateful to him for giving way, but he has not understood the argument. The amendment in the House of Lords, which was accepted by the Government, allowed for a minimum of three judges. Such a mechanism allows for the number required. They would be High Court judges, and therefore a higher level of scrutiny would occur than if circuit judges undertook that scrutiny, as my hon. Friend suggests. That would not be as great a protection of civil liberties as the mechanism that is now proposed.

Mr. Cohen: I still have problems with the commissioners' role. A minimum of three means that there could be only three, which would not address the issue of urgency raised by the shadow Home Secretary earlier.

The commissioners were first established to hear complaints. They have a highly restricted remit to uphold complaints. Surveillance and covert searches are likely to be authorised if a chief constable thinks that they are necessary; they would then be approved by one of the commissioners. However, it would be difficult for the commissioner to uphold a complaint unless it was extraordinarily perverse. It is therefore unlikely that complaints would be upheld.

The commissioners do not have to give a reason for rejecting a complaint. Even more seriously, their decision cannot be appealed against or even questioned in court, so a complainant could not take the matter further. Like the commissioners who oversee the security services legislation, their role in relation to complaints will be tokenist. In the security services, not a single complaint has been upheld to my knowledge and the same would be the case with those commissioners, who will now have a prior consent function. Although it is said that they are likely to be senior judges, that will not necessarily be so, and, over time, that criterion might be diminished and a loophole might arise.

Exceptions would be made for very urgent cases, which is another loophole which might be widened over time. My real objection to the commissioners' role is that they will be the authorisers in the first instance and the appeal system in the second. They may even have given prior approval to bug and burgle in the first place. That is an unacceptable confusion of roles, and is wrong.

The term "serious crime" is extremely broadly defined. That definition gives the authority to bug and burgle. The Law Society, among others, has sent a briefing note to hon. Members saying that the term should be much more narrowly defined. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said, the provision includes conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose. It will be aimed at demonstrators, those involved in industrial relations and other protesters. It is a catch-all which would take in peaceful protestors as well. It would give the authority to bug and burgle thousands of potential "Swampies" just because a police chief thinks that they are potential criminals. Such protestors should not be automatically regarded as likely criminals, let alone have their home, their parents' home and their friends' homes subjected to bugging and burglary, which could happen under the Bill.

The Home Secretary confirmed that surveillance and bugging have been going on for a long time, and the Bill is needed to legalise it. That casts light on the dubious legality that has been occurring. It amounts to an interesting confession of unlawfulness. For consistency, I suggest that a criminal conviction certificate should be issued on the Home Secretary and the Government before the election, because they have acted unlawfully and have a long criminal record in that respect.

My third point is about criminal conviction certificates, which will be operated by the new quango, the criminal records agency. I oppose imposing a fee of, say, a tenner, particularly on a long-term unemployed person. We do not know how frequently people will have to update their CCC—it will probably be at the mere whim of their employer. A similar cost applies to volunteers who work for worthy organisations, and perhaps to those organisations themselves. Therefore, there is a severe problem with fees.

Hon. Members will have received a brief from the Trades Union Congress about employee criminal records. It says that there are cases

"where employers should not only have every right to check a prospective employee's criminal record, but ought to be under a duty to do so"—

for example, those who work with children.

The TUC also says:

"a positive case should be made for employee checks on a case by case basis",

otherwise it can amount to an unwarranted intrusion into a person's privacy and lead to higher crime rates.

In a passage about increasing crime, the TUC says that general checks

"would be likely to create a class of permanently unemployable people, many of whom have only offended once, and would be unlikely to do so again if they had steady employment."

It continues:

"Particularly for younger offenders these"

measures

"make it extremely difficult for them to 'go straight' through entry into the world of work . . . If they cannot get employment as a result of their conviction, they are far more likely to re-offend. Four out of five people supervised by the probation service were unemployed when convicted."

The TUC argues that Parliament should have another look at the section about CCCs. It says:

"Drawing the balance between the need to protect the public, the civil liberties of job applicants and the dangers of creating a permanently unemployable criminal underclass is not an easy matter. But we believe that Section V as it is currently drawn does not get that balance right."

Those are very relevant representations by a body that is expert in this field, and its remarks were confirmed by the Home Office's consultation paper "Disclosure of Criminal Records for Employment Vetting Purposes", published in September 1993, which said, as confirmed in a recent parliamentary answer to me:

"35 per cent. of men and 8 per cent. of women will have a criminal record of some sort by the age of 35".

It is they who will suffer and become part of the criminal underclass.

Paragraph 48 of the 1993 consultation paper said:

"The argument for a closed record is essentially to do with rehabilitation. Those who have a criminal record need to be given a chance to reform and live it down. An open conviction record would make this more difficult, and in particular would reduce ex-offenders' chance of getting work."

Somewhere between the 1993 Home Office paper and the Bill, the Government changed their mind, but the arguments are still very relevant.

The Bill is a bad measure. Just before a general election, we often have ill-thought-out legislation, even if it is well intentioned. The Child Support Agency is an example of that; the Police Bill is another. However, because important civil liberties are at stake, I hope that the Bill fails as a result of an election being called; more sane consideration could then be given to the balance between civil liberties and essential policing work without the election pressures that are felt by Front Benchers, and civil liberties would be more protected.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield, I intend to vote for the Liberal Democrat amendment. There are few matters on which I agree with the Liberal Democrats, but on this occasion I will vote with them and against the Bill.

7.43 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) concentrated, as have other hon. Members, on the civil liberties aspect of the Bill. Indeed,

[Mr. John Greenway]

the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) referred to "lost liberty". We really should put the other point of view.

The freedom of our citizens is being undermined not by some conspiracy at the heart of government or the institutions that uphold authority in this country but by terrorists, whose acts of barbarism maim and kill innocent people, close off streets and town centres and cause massive inconvenience to large sections of the population, including the House; by drug traffickers, who prey on our young people and destroy their lives and their future prospects; and by organised criminals who, through theft and fraud on a grand scale that makes the great train robbery look like a minor crime, are ruining and destroying the financial security and prosperity of businesses and individuals alike.

I say that because I believe that the House has to make up its mind. Are we serious about reducing crime and making this country safer for our citizens and unattractive for criminals? The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made a point that I wanted to make about the policing arrangements that we need in order to achieve that objective. He said that we are not living in the era of "Dixon of Dock Green". Communities throughout the length and breadth of Britain face ruthless, determined and evil men who care nothing for the interests and property of others. That is the background against which we have to consider the measures in the Bill.

It is always rewarding to see recommendations from Select Committee inquiries in which a great deal of time and effort has been invested coming to fruition in Government action and legislative proposals. I am sorry that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) is not in his place, because he referred to the Home Affairs Select Committee report on organised crime. You will know from personal experience, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the Home Affairs Committee has an exemplary record, and many of its recommendations relating to criminal justice, the police and fighting crime have found their way on to the statute book or have been implemented in other ways.

The first three parts of the Bill refer to matters that were considered by the Committee and very closely follow our recommendations. In our report, we concluded that, although the extent of organised crime in the United Kingdom is not so great as in some other western democracies, the threat is nevertheless very real and, increasingly, criminal gangs are international in their organisation and are resourced to an unprecedented extent, very often because of their association with drug trafficking.

The Committee recognised, as does the House generally, that there is a need for greater action at national level to co-ordinate intelligence gathering and the efforts of regional crime squads in dealing with crime, which frequently extends way beyond police boundaries. In my own force area in North Yorkshire, where before coming to the House I was vice-chairman of the police authority, more and more serious crime is committed not by local villains but by gangs from Teesside—I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)—from the north-east, from West Yorkshire, Humberside, the west midlands, Greater Manchester and occasionally even the south-east of England.

North Yorkshire police have had considerable success in endeavouring to counter this threat, but increasingly they face huge logistical difficulties. I came to the view some time ago that the sharing of intelligence and the co-ordination of activity between crime squads on a national scale is essential to achieve better results. Those are the key objectives of parts I and II of the Bill.

I will now deal with the new national structure for the National Criminal Intelligence Service. In both the gathering of criminal intelligence at the domestic level and as the focal point for effective contact with overseas law enforcement agencies, NCIS has a crucial role to play in the fight against organised crime, but it needs greater freedom of action and freedom to manage its affairs.

The Select Committee was also told that on occasions it was important for NCIS to undertake what might be described as operational activities, which could involve surveillance beyond mere intelligence gathering. Despite misgivings in some quarters about accountability, NCIS must be allowed the opportunity to ensure that its intelligence gathering is not frustrated by an inability to follow up leads and inquiries when gathering important information about criminal activity. Provision for that is one of the Bill's essential features.

I am glad that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton is now present, so that I can pay tribute to his work as Chairman of the Select Committee, which produced a tremendous report on organised crime. The evidence that we received confirmed that regional crime squads were an essential part of the policing system in the fight against crime. They have been reduced from nine to six in recent years. There was and remains an imbalance in their resourcing and effectiveness, because the funding of each squad is set by the police authority, which wants to contribute the least amount of money.

The former national co-ordinator of regional crime squads and the then director general of NCIS strongly recommended the creation of a National Crime Squad under the control of a national director. That would allow a more co-ordinated and effective use of resources, which reflected the fact that criminals do not limit their activity to one region.

Similarly, as regional forces concentrate on their local problems, full advantage has not always been taken of information provided by NCIS, which by its nature is often on a national and international scale. For some time there has been a pressing need for the response to serious and organised crime to be sharpened and made more effective. That requires a more co-ordinated national structure—a National Crime Squad.

The funding arrangements for NCIS and the National Crime Squad are unnecessarily complicated. I am aware of the well rehearsed arguments in favour of levies as opposed to top slicing. However, in my view those two new organisations are so important that they should be funded centrally.

Doubtless my right hon. Friend the Minister will seek to persuade me that neither the levy nor the charging system will be unnecessarily bureaucratic. I rather think, however, that that is precisely how it will turn out. Recommendations were made some time ago—you will recall them, Madam Deputy Speaker—on the Forensic Science Service. We were persuaded to recommend a charging structure. It has taken a long time for that to bed

down, and even now some of us are not entirely sure that forensic science is being used as often as it should be, because police forces are charged for the service.

The two new national bodies will be at the forefront of the fight against crime. We should be totally assured that they will have the resources they need to maximise their operational effectiveness. I think that the Home Secretary of the day is best placed to ensure that that happens, although I acknowledge that it will weaken the input on funding decisions from local authorities and police committees, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has been at pains to ensure is enshrined in the arrangements that he outlined.

The Police Federation is anxious that officers deployed in NCIS or the National Crime Squad will not be covered by police regulations but by new arrangements outlined in the Bill. The federation has expressed concern that the recently revised discipline procedures for the police service should apply nationally, including to these two national police organisations. Officers should also have the right to representation at complaints and disciplinary hearings.

That is important, especially for officers in the National Crime Squad, who will be serving at the sharp end of the police service. They will have to deal with some of the most ruthless, nasty and dangerous criminals in the country, who are not slow to make malicious and mischievous complaints against officers. It is crucial that those officers have the comfort of knowing that the disciplinary arrangements are the same as in their own domestic forces. If there is any reason to believe—as the Police Federation clearly does—that the proposed arrangements do not provide that comfort, that must be rectified either in Committee or on Report. That is an extremely important matter.

Part III of the Bill has proved to be by far the most controversial. It attempts to provide a regulatory framework for the use of intrusive surveillance. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred to the fact that that was a recommendation of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton said, the police asked for the use of surveillance to be regulated, and I think that it should be.

However, having listened to the arguments made in this debate and elsewhere in the past few weeks, I must say that some of the reaction to the proposals has been rather hysterical. Some media coverage has given the erroneous impression that the Bill provides the police with powers that they have not previously enjoyed. In fact, they have been using these powers for a very long time, but we need to regulate them.

It is clear that the use of intrusive surveillance has become an essential tool in the fight against organised crime and terrorism. In the great majority of cases when the police are in hot pursuit of organised criminals, a requirement for them to seek prior approval would seriously hamper their operational effectiveness.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: There is more in favour of the police's position than my hon. Friend has explained.

Mr. Greenway: I have not finished.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: It was unlawful for the police to trespass on someone's premises. It was not a criminal offence, but it was unlawful and they could be sued. Although there were guidelines and the courts treated the evidence that was found as admissible, it was necessary for the police, who always want to be on the right side of the law, to take a risk that the legislation to regulate such action would be harsher than that which they had hitherto enjoyed. So the police deserve greater credit than my hon. Friend has given them.

Mr. Greenway: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend. He has provided greater clarification than anyone else—he has even made it clearer than he did in his speech, which I listened to attentively.

To what extent do the new regulatory arrangements hamper the police's operational effectiveness? They have asked for this regulatory framework, but they have also made it abundantly clear that there are dangers in going too far and making life unnecessarily difficult. We should be a little more circumspect. I have listened to the concerns expressed on both sides of the House that this touches on some important and sensitive issues. The idea that the police will want to use bugging devices in solicitors' offices, doctors' surgeries, Catholic confessionals or even in people's homes on a daily basis is preposterous. However, I agree that the use of intrusive surveillance in homes and offices is a sensitive matter, which in normal circumstances should require prior approval. I made that point to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary several weeks ago.

My right hon. and learned Friend has clearly listened carefully to views about where the balance should best be struck. I have felt for some time that the best practical solution is to allow the chief constable authorisation, subject to immediate review by a commissioner, in the great majority of instances in which the police need to use intrusive surveillance techniques. We have already heard about car homing devices today.

When the use of intrusive surveillance in sensitive premises is planned, prior authorisation should be required, but I feel that in cases of extreme urgency chief constables must retain the power to authorise—although, again, that power should be subject to immediate review. I believe that they will use it extremely sparingly. I know that the House is being asked in effect to approve a proposed structure without any amendments having been tabled to the Bill, but I feel that the arrangements that we are discussing had to be aired on Second Reading, although in fact they are not contained in the legislation as it stands.

I also feel that, in reviewing the use of the powers with which we are dealing, the PACE test of reasonableness is probably the most appropriate test. If we do not use that test, there may well be occasions—as my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out—on which the police get it wrong and, with the benefit of hindsight, people want to second-guess and criticise. I touched on this in an intervention, but I may not have explained clearly enough. I think that the key consideration in a retrospective consideration should be based on what the chief constable knew—or should reasonably have known—at the time, rather than on information became available subsequently.

I honestly believe that, if we cannot trust our chief constables with these powers, we are in a sorry state. I have every confidence that our chief constables will use the powers effectively. I think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary—and, to be fair, the

[Mr. Greenway]

hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—deserve a great deal of credit for reaching such a sensible compromise, and I hope that the Bill can now progress without further delay.

Arrangements allowing better targeting and co-ordination of police operations to deal with organised crime are long overdue. Our constituents want nothing more than to see the police tackle crime more vigorously, so that more villains are brought before the courts. Our constituents expect us to give the police the support and powers that they need to achieve that worthy aim, and we should do so by allowing the Bill a Second Reading.

8.2 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I take a slightly more sceptical view than the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) of some of the activities in which the police engage. I am glad, but not surprised, that the Bill is having to be substantially rewritten. Just about all the legislation introduced by the present Home Secretary has had to be rewritten. With the possible exception of the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), I cannot think of a Minister who has been required to eat so much humble pie without its having the slightest effect on his demeanour.

The Home Secretary's change of heart is, I think, based on the belated realisation that the Bill, unamended, will not be passed. Indeed, I believe that he has been told as much by many of his hon. Friends, and all credit to them. The Bill raises serious issues, on which a number of hon. Members—not least my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen)—have touched. I do not take the apocalyptic view of the Bill expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who read out a long list of people who objected to it; I think that most of those people objected to the Bill as originally drafted, rather than the form that it will take after being amended.

I intend to concentrate on part III, but I want to make a couple of points about the National Crime Squad. It is important for that body to be accountable, but I am not convinced that the provisions in the Bill are adequate for the purpose. The matter needs to be explored in Committee. There is a history of unhappy experience with elite police squads: the West Midlands serious crime squad and the Metropolitan police pornography and drugs squads come to mind, but there are others. They became a law unto themselves, and senior officers lost control. Some members of those elite squads even turned to crime. Police authorities have proved entirely ineffective in bringing them to book, and have been rendered even less effective by the Home Secretary's recent reforms of their composition.

There are signs that some problems that are familiar elsewhere may already be surfacing at NCIS. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) mentioned some instances. Details of confidential inquiries appear to have been leaked to the subject of those inquiries, and only a few weeks ago it was reported that officers at NCIS were unable to account for records of large amounts of material that had been obtained as a result of surveillance. That is relevant to part III. If we are to have a National Crime Squad that will enjoy public confidence, it must be properly accountable.

I shall now deal with the most controversial part of the Bill. Let me say at the outset that I accept the central premise of part III—that there is sometimes a regrettable necessity for police to eavesdrop on those whom they have good reason to believe may be involved in serious crime. Given the intrusion into personal liberty, however, such action must be properly regulated.

I have no doubt that authorisation should be a matter for High Court rather than circuit judges. I am sure that there are many fine circuit judges who are perfectly capable of rigorously scrutinising applications to bug domestic premises, but they are not necessarily the ones who will be asked—more than once, at least. The judges who will be asked are those—there are many of them—who can be relied on to sign whatever is put before them. Circuit judges are often too much part of the local establishment to be relied on always to exercise the rigorous scrutiny that will be required. I should add that history records that some High Court judges have shown themselves extraordinarily gullible, not to say downright foolish, in accepting at face value the official version of events, especially when it has been delivered by men in police uniform. I recognise, however, that they are probably better placed than anyone to exercise proper scrutiny in this regard.

The police should not be allowed to pick and choose which commissioner to approach. If we allow that, there is a danger that the police will go for the softest touch. The commissioners should themselves draw up a rota to avoid that problem.

Clause 94 provides for authorisation to be given orally in urgent cases. As others have said, that is potentially a large loophole. The commissioners will need to watch the number of urgent cases carefully, and so shall we.

Inevitably—not much has been made of this so far today—much of the material gleaned through surveillance, perhaps all in some cases, will be irrelevant to the investigation. Some will be highly personal, while some will relate to people who are not involved in any way. My question—a question that I asked the Home Secretary in an intervention—is this: what happens to the material once it is no longer required? What assurance have we that it will be kept under lock and key and not used to entertain the troops, as has happened on some occasions? How quickly will it be destroyed?

There is a provision in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 allowing innocent fingerprints to be destroyed. What obligation is there on the investigating officer to report to the commissioner on the destruction of irrelevant material? That matter needs to be examined carefully. I have had a quick look through the draft code of practice that appeared belatedly in the Vote Office and I do not see the destruction of relevant material mentioned anywhere in the code. When I raised the matter in an intervention, I received no satisfactory reply from the Home Secretary. We shall have to consider the matter in Committee.

Incidentally, I note that, once signed, those warrants will last for six months in relation to non-urgent cases and 15 days in relation to urgent cases. In six months, much material can be accumulated and much of it will be irrelevant to the subject of the investigation. We need to find out what is going to happen to such material.

My fourth point arises from clause 92, which defines the circumstances under which bugging is permitted. Similar definitions are contained in the Interception of

Communications Act 1985 and in the Intelligence Services Act 1994, which regulate the activities of the police and security services in respect of telephone tapping. As others have remarked, the definition of serious crimes in subsection (5) is sufficiently wide to include all sorts of innocent or relatively innocent activities. In particular, there is the reference to

"conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose".

When pressed on the point, the Home Secretary said that the provision might, for example, refer to groups of neo-Nazis trying to disrupt a football match. It might, but it could include many other people: strikers, members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or indeed organisers of any public demonstration.

The solution is simple; the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) suggested it earlier. The "or" at the end of subsection (5)(a) should be changed to "and", which would bring only offences likely to attract a prison sentence of three years or more within the Bill's scope. Similar amendments should be made to the other Acts to which I have referred.

Fifthly, I wonder—I do this hesitantly, as I do not know much about the technology involved—whether I am right in thinking that technology already exists to enable conversations to be monitored simply by pointing a beam at a window. Could it be that, in a few years from now, it will hardly be necessary to break into premises to monitor conversations therein, and that most bugging of domestic premises, or indeed a lawyer's offices, will be exempt from the Bill because, as I say, it is necessary only to point a beam at a window?

I do not know: I just ask. I suspect that that is the way in which things are going. I would hate to discover in a few years' time that most bugging is carried out by some other method entirely than that which we all think is relevant in relation to the Bill. I would appreciate some clarification of that point from the Minister, if he has the opportunity when he sums up.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: The question is whether that is covered by the requirement for wireless telegraphy. Is a beam wireless telegraphy? That is something that the Minister might answer.

Mr. Mullin: I hope that we shall get clarification on the matter in due course because it is potentially an important one.

Finally, I have grave difficulty in accepting that there are circumstances when it is necessary to bug a lawyer's office. I would like to hear—perhaps Committee is the appropriate place to have this discussion—some hard examples of cases where it has been necessary to bug a lawyer's offices. I accept that some lawyers misbehave, but I wonder whether the intrusion into liberty involved in bugging a lawyer's office outweighs any possible benefits. I just remark on that for the time being, but we shall have to consider the matter more closely in Committee, quite apart from which, if we do monitor a lawyer's offices, we are bound to pick up information about all sorts of other cases that were not the subject of the authorisation obtained. That is inevitable, and a potential problem too.

As I have said, the Bill is long overdue. I have no objection to the fundamental necessity in some particular and carefully defined and carefully authorised cases for the police to bug criminals or people whom they suspect are criminals. It brings within the law an area of police activity that has far too often been clouded in obscurity. It inevitably involves interference with liberties that we rightly prize. It is brought to us by a Home Secretary who has shown himself careless of personal liberty, so we must consider the Bill carefully. Subject to the amendments that the Government propose, I shall not oppose it tonight, but it must be considered carefully in Committee.

8.15 pm

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): In following the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), I shall start by saying that I am afraid that I have perhaps more confidence in the police than he does. I believe that we should back them. We should back them against the civil liberties lobby in particular. In the Bill, we have a balance that is just about right.

This is an important Bill. It is one of a series that the Home Secretary is introducing. In the past four years, we have had a variety of Bills, some of which have not yet been implemented. I think particularly of the power to lock away young offenders, which Parliament gave, although the places to put them in are not yet ready. It is right that we should have the series of measures coming through to toughen up the law and to give agencies that implement the law the tools and the power that they need. The Bill will help them to reduce serious crime—in the Bill, we are talking particularly of serious crime.

In the other place, the parts of the Bill that cover the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service have not had as much publicity as other aspects of the Bill, but both bodies are moves in the right direction. It is correct that we should put them on to a statutory footing. The fact that the crime squad will work with police forces to investigate crime not just locally, but at national and at international level is to be welcomed. That will bring great benefits in the fight against major crime.

It is important that we should support those bodies, particularly in relation to the fight against drugs, which is a major problem and which is not getting any better. Much of their work will involve that problem. Some 10 years ago or more, I was taken by a chief superintendent around a housing estate in my old constituency of The Wrekin. He pointed out that he believed that the estate probably had the worst house-breaking problem of any in the West Mercia police authority region. He reckoned that 80 per cent. of the burglaries were drug-oriented. If that was the position then, I am sure that the matter is no better today.

NCIS has worked well under the Home Office and it has had some great successes, which we have heard about from other Members during the debate, but it is right to put it, at this stage, on a statutory footing. The one concern I have, which has been mentioned by other hon. Members, was raised with me by the West Midland Police Federation. It did not seem to have been involved in the Bill. It welcomes it, as does the Association of Chief Police Officers, but it rightly feels that it has not been consulted to the extent that it used to be consulted in the earlier days of the Government.

It would have been better for more consultations to have taken place. Certainly, that is the view of my police federation. It raises three points, which I think are all legitimate. It is concerned about officers having different disciplinary regulations, different police regulations and

[Mr. Warren Hawksley]

different complaints procedures when they are with the squad or NCIS than when they are with their own force. Members of the federation think that that is wrong and that it is confusing, and they do not find it very helpful.

Federation members also require clarification—I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will provide it in his reply—on whether it is intended that people working in those squads should be covered by the normal procedure allowing them to bring a colleague or friend to represent them. Conservative Members have already mentioned that matter. I remember that—in the early or mid-1980s, when I served on a Committee examining a Bill—I supported an amendment that had been tabled by the then Member of Parliament for Bury St. Edmunds, who was representing the Police Federation, which tried to give that right to charged officers. We should ensure that the facility is retained for police force members if they are brought under disciplinary procedures. It is very important that we should do so.

As for the issue of placing technology on a statutory footing, I cannot express it better than a letter sent to a newspaper by ACPO representatives. The letter covered the issue very well, and was signed by the president and officers of the organisation. It stated:

"The Police Bill does not provide for new tactics. It seeks to put existing activity on a statutory basis—a point which the police (and others, including Law Lords) believe increases accountability."

The letter goes on to describe the way in which announcements, discussions and debates have been reported. It states:

"Some editors and others, who really should know better—including some solicitors, barristers, and even some members of the House of Lords—have suggested that the police will seek to listen to conversations between solicitors and clients. It would be quite unlawful for chief constables to authorise such activity on those grounds alone."

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) might be interested in the next part of the letter. It states:

"If, however, it were to be suspected that solicitors were discussing corrupt acts such as money-laundering and jury-fixing, they would not be protected—nor should they be."

I agree entirely with that view. It continues:

"If solicitors or their premises were to be specifically exempted from surveillance we can readily guess where armed robbers could go to plan their next raid."

I think that we would be causing many problems if we took that route.

I listened carefully to the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on the compromise he reached with Opposition Front Benchers on the problems resulting from the amendments passed in the other place. Although I would have been quite happy with the original provisions, I am prepared to accept the changes that he has proposed. However, I believe that—in cases of emergency, although it would not be the norm—it is absolutely essential that there should be that discretion to obtain the commissioner's approval after the event.

It was very disappointing that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) suggested that such a discretion would drive a coach and horses through the legislation, because I do not believe that it would. The shadow Home Secretary covered the point very well, as did the Home Secretary, and he gave examples of when the Bill's provisions would have to be used very quickly. It is essential that the amendment does not eliminate such emergency use.

It is interesting to see the way in which the Labour party has come round on matters of law and order during this Session of Parliament. New Labour now believes that the issue of law and order is important, and we are learning that Labour Members are very concerned by it. I have served on many Committees, and, right back to 1979, any attempt by the Government to toughen up the law has never had Opposition support. However, I also served on the Committee examining the recent Crime (Sentences) Bill, and I was fascinated at how rarely the Opposition forced divisions, even on such important matters as mandatory sentencing. Although the other place seems to be taking a more robust line against the Government, the changes we are witnessing in the Opposition are very important.

It is also important that the Labour party is supporting the Government's attempts to toughen up law and order. I welcome that conversion, and I hope that it is genuine and that it will continue. I hope that Labour is now seeing the error of its ways. I believe that the public are demanding that hon. Members of all political persuasions take a tough line and act very firmly on crime.

The criminal records agency, which I welcome, has caused many comments in this debate. However, I hope that it will be accurate. Within the past week, a constituent of mine, who is a mini-cab driver, needed to attain a certificate. He discovered that, according to police records, he apparently had a conviction 20 years previously for child abuse. There have been great problems in clarifying the matter, because it was claimed that the offence had occurred in what was originally the West Mercia police authority, but which is now the West Midlands authority. By establishing an agency, I hope that we shall gradually have a much more accurate record. I have been having problems in this specific case in clearing my constituent's record, although he has assured me that he has never been charged with or convicted of child abuse. The problem is that he has been refused a job as a cab driver until it is confirmed that his record is clear.

We have heard about various organisations, such as guides and scouts, with problems and fears about having to pay for certificates. I have received a letter from the Worcestershire Federation of Young Farmers Clubs—an organisation which one would not necessarily expect to be concerned and worried about certificates—that states:

"As a Voluntary Youth Organisation in Worcestershire we feel that, should this Bill be passed catastrophic implications for our group and many like ours will occur. We are a self funding organisation with NO County Council grant aid, with 450 plus members who's ages range from 11 years to 26 years together with a huge back up support of older, usually past members who give their free time to help up and coming new members.

To pay for a police check of TEN pounds for every person over the age of 18 would cover about half of our current membership, together with every parent and past member who offers to help coach netball or paint scenery for a pantomime. We would NOT be in a position to cover these costs which would mean that rural and city members alike would lose an organisation they love to be part of."

I am very concerned about the idea that we should charge. The description of the Bill's financial effects seems to be so vague, stating that about 8 million to 20 million might be affected. It also mentions

"uncertainties about the initial demand."

In his reply, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will tell us a bit more about those matters. I am not quite sure how many people will need certificates, and it would be helpful to know the number, and whether the cost will be as large as the £200 million figure he suggested. The description of the financial effects also states that, in the first year, the cost could be as low as £10 million. That would not be an unacceptable figure—if it would allow the voluntary sector to continue without concern for its future. We must look after those people.

I believe that we are right to support this Bill. I hope that it will receive massive support and a smooth passage, and I particularly hope that it will be on the statute book before the general election. However, I also hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will tell us, either in his reply to this debate or in Committee, how the legislation can be amended to reassure the Police Federation and such organisations as the Young Farmers Clubs.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next hon. Member, I should say that I know that several hon. Members still wish to speak. They will be disappointed unless succeeding speeches are kept succinct.

8.28 pm

Mr. Nell Gerrard (Walthamstow): I shall do my best to follow that instruction.

It has been obvious during the debate, particularly from the number of interventions on the Home Secretary, that there is still a great deal of disquiet about the Bill on both sides of the House. The original drafting has been improved, but it is still defective. The Secretary of State said that action should be taken against organised professional criminals. We all accept that that is necessary. The test of the Bill is whether it does that, while maintaining the necessary safeguards for civil liberties.

I shall deal first with the provisions for surveillance and bugging of premises. Everyone who has spoken in the debate has recognised that there are circumstances in which bugging and surveillance are necessary. There is no dispute about that. However, we should also accept that the number of cases and the scope should be limited. There should also be easy redress when the bugging cannot be justified.

I welcome the fact that there will be regulation of an activity that the police have carried out in an unregulated way for many years. However, I still have great concerns about the Bill. Although we are told that there will be amendments, none of us has seen the text of them or the promised codes of practice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) was the first speaker in the debate to raise two issues that I should like to address. They are worth repeating. First, we should consider what is being regulated. With modern technology, it is obvious that bugging techniques are improving all the time. The Bill refers to entry of or interference with property. I suspect, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South said, that we are close to the point—if we have not already reached it—at which it will be possible to listen to conversations going on inside a property without needing to enter that property to place a bug. It is not clear whether that will be regulated by the Bill. We might end up with a measure dealing only with protection of entry to property rather than the central issue of intrusive surveillance.

The second point is what happens to the material collected. Let us suppose that a solicitor is bugged. I can imagine circumstances in which that might be justified, as the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) pointed out. There might be evidence of a solicitor being involved in criminal activity, for example. However, it is impossible to bug a solicitor without also recording conversations with innocent clients who are in no way connected with the crime of which the solicitor is suspected. Those people may never know about that if the information obtained from the bugging is not used in a prosecution. What safeguards do they have? How can we be sure that the information gained in that way does not find its way on to police intelligence computers?

If, for whatever reason, my fingerprints are taken, I know that that has been done. If no charges result, I know that I can see those records destroyed. What happens if information is collected on me without my knowledge because there has been no charge or prosecution? I was far from convinced by the Secretary of State's reply to my intervention during his speech that it will be up to the courts to decide. The issue may never reach a court. It is not good enough to accept that information collected in that way may end up on police intelligence systems. That also relates to the other provision in the Bill that I want to consider—criminal records certificates. The bugging of a solicitor's office is just one example. I suspect that many bugging operations will inevitably involve the collection of large amounts of information irrelevant to the purpose of the bugging. What happens to that is very important.

I do not want to repeat important comments made by other hon. Members about the definition of serious crime and prior authority, because those issues have been adequately covered. My final point about this part of the Bill—the issue crops up again in the provisions relating to criminal records—relates to the complaints mechanisms. The mechanism in the Bill is inadequate. The commissioner's decision is not open to challenge by a court or open to appeal. I understand from the opening speeches that there will be some amendments and we shall not be left in the current position in which all that is at stake in any complaint will be on a judicial review basis. I should be happier if it was clear that the authorisation mechanisms and the complaints mechanisms were completely separate and there was no possibility of the commissioners being involved in both. That would give me more confidence.

On part V, I am less than happy at the growing demands—not just in the Bill—for information about people who have convictions to be made available to the public. We are in danger of losing some principles that we have always had about privacy mattering and people having the opportunity, after having a conviction and serving a sentence, to go back to normal, productive life.

I accept that there must be a balance. It would clearly be wrong for those with certain types of conviction to be able to hide the fact. There are particular problems with organised paedophile activity which have been clearly illustrated recently. If a conviction is relevant to a job, a mechanism is needed for establishing the fact. The current position is clearly not satisfactory. People slip through

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the net of the current mixture of legislation and practices—Thomas Hamilton in Dunblane was mentioned as an example.

I believe that the Bill is too broad and has too few safeguards. I suspect that the criminal convictions certificate—the lower level of certificate—will become the norm. The Secretary of State suggested that there might be a time limit. I do not know what that limit will be. I suspect that some people will be asked repeatedly. Once criminal convictions certificates come into use, there will be an incentive for someone applying for a job to get one. If I were applying for a job and I knew that I had a clean record, I might well want to get a copy of my certificate and enclose it with my application. I suspect that it will not be long before they become the norm for a range of jobs, for many of which convictions will be irrelevant. It has been pointed out earlier that there is a danger of some people becoming unemployable and inevitably drifting back into crime.

Cautions are to be included in the enhanced checks. Many people accept a caution without realising that they are implicitly admitting that they have done something. I suspect that that will change and more cases in which people would currently accept a caution will go to court. The caution might become a less useful mechanism than at present.

Mr. Benn: Has my hon. Friend considered the position of someone who committed an act under the Sexual Offences Act 1967 which would no longer be an offence? He would have to submit a document saying that he had had a homosexual relationship at a time when that was an offence, even though it no longer is. The provisions are grossly biased against some people's backgrounds.

Mr. Gerrard: That is a very good example of an action having been an offence that led to a conviction but ceasing to be an offence. What is the position then?

I am particularly concerned about the enhanced certificates and the inclusion of acquittal information, information that may be acquired in bugging and speculative information from police intelligence. Anyone who has seen the quality of some police intelligence would be concerned. I do not believe that chief constables should be the sole power in deciding what can and cannot be disclosed. If we are to have such certificates, we must have mechanisms for redress.

The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge raised a constituency case. I recently dealt with a similar case. A constituent of mine, Mrs. Iqbal, applied for a job with the social services department, which asked her to get evidence from the police of her criminal record. She wrote to me and explained that she had no worries about that because she had never been in trouble with the police and had never been convicted. The police responded to the social services department's inquiry telling it that she had a conviction for shoplifting. What proved to have happened was that the police had confused her with someone else of the same name who had a similar date of birth. Fortunately, the social services department was willing to hold open the job offer for four or five weeks until the matter was cleared up. She had resigned from her previous job and could have lost her new job. As it was, she lost several weeks' wages as a result of that trivial mistake.

How is it possible to correct such mistakes? All we have in the Bill as it stands is clause 107, which states:

> "Where an applicant . . . believes that the information contained in the certificate is inaccurate he may make an application in writing to the Secretary of State for a new certificate."

I think that that is a completely inadequate mechanism for redress. We need much better safeguards, allowing people to challenge the accuracy of information on certificates. An amendment moved in another place would have set up an independent tribunal to which applications could have been made, which would have been a much more satisfactory mechanism. It is wrong that information can be sent to a prospective employer in an enhanced certificate that the applicant never sees and therefore does not have the possibility of challenging.

As I said at the outset, this Bill is better than the original draft, but it is still full of problems. There are no mechanisms by which people can seek redress, get compensation or challenge what is said about them. What happens if someone loses a job as a result of inaccurate information given about them—perhaps based on police intelligence? I still have very serious concerns about the Bill. I know that we are promised an amendment and that the Bill will come back to us eventually in a different form. It needs to be significantly different from its present form.

8.42 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): At the beginning of the debate, I raised with the Home Secretary the question whether the Bill was a serious constitutional Bill. Speeches for and against the Bill have underlined over and over again that it is. It touches the very heart of society and the very heart of the life of society. As the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) put so well, it is strange that there is a one-way street when it comes to capital and labour. How can it be that I am not allowed to know the criminal background of my employer but he has the right to demand details of my criminal background if I have one? There is something very seriously wrong about that.

I deplore the attitude of the Home Secretary. I said that I did not want to hinder him in getting the Bill through the House, but that the matter must be thoroughly discussed. Undigested legislation is a curse. We find out later all the mistakes that we could have found out if we had had full discussion. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) said that there are other Bills to get through, but that is absolutely no argument. If we push through legislation on this important matter because other Bills are lining up to get through, we shall not have a good Bill.

My record is well known: I am a supporter of the police. I have stood alone in the European Parliament to defend the Royal Ulster Constabulary against everybody who was present. I believe that the police need to be supported. I believe that the hour is grave and that we should listen to what action the police feel should be taken. Legislators have a responsibility to discern what they can support absolutely and what they must question—searching to see whether other provisions can be made. We cannot give policemen a blank cheque. They also must be subject to the law. When the police force or individual members of it are not subject to the law, they bring contempt on the whole power and moral authority of the police.

I regret the attitude of the Home Secretary. I also regret the attitude of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who argued that the Bill was not a constitutional Bill. I believe that it is and that this House should not kick it upstairs after tonight's debate. I am convinced about that because those of us who support the principle of supporting the police are being asked to give a blank cheque in return for being shown amendments later. We want to see the thrust of the amendments now so that we can have a proper debate on Second Reading.

The amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats should not just be dismissed as it was from the Labour Front Bench. By tabling an amendment, the Liberal Democrats are at least putting on a brake and saying that on some things we need to be absolutely sure. Any of us who have been long in the House have learned that, when both Front-Bench teams make an agreement, one's voice is a cry in the wilderness. Everybody knows that it is very hard to make the crooked path straight and the rough places smooth when the two Front-Bench teams have made an agreement. Yet due to the Bill's constitutional nature, both Front-Bench teams have a responsibility not to start rushing on but to listen.

The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), who is for the Bill, made some very trenchant criticisms and raised some questions that needed to be listened to. One of them was that we should dismiss any suggestion that records could be wrong, yet the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) have brought proof that the records have been wrong. I have had experience of it in my constituency. It took me months to get the records set straight, but all the damage was done and the individual suffered from it. It is not easy to repair such damage.

Let us consider the multitude of certificates that will be floating about. I have a criminal record—I am quite proud of it. I was sent to this House because the people of North Antrim said that I did right to go to gaol and make my protest—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): A constitutional record.

Rev. Ian Paisley: A constitutional record, yes, but I do not mind. The Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for having a criminal record and we know that he was the sinless son of God who died for sins of poor sinners like the people who sit in this House, including myself. There is repentance, forgiveness and conversion. If we do not believe in that, there is no hope. Why should a person be held to ransom for ever because of something he has done? Christ taught that there can be no forgiveness without repentance, and if a man repents and shows that he has left his old path, he should be helped, not hindered, by society.

I was amazed by the Home Secretary's attitude to the fee for certificates. He said that everybody can pay £5 or £6. Can they? If people are unemployed for a long time, £5 is very precious to them. I had the biggest lobby that I have ever had on one subject from the voluntary organisations on this issue. People with time on their hands go to voluntary organisations to volunteer. Should the organisations tell people that they must pay £6 or £10 for a certificate before they can work? How many people will volunteer then? My constituency has a large farming community and, like the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge, I was lobbied by young farmers' clubs. I hope that the Home Secretary will listen to their voices. Serious damage could be done to voluntary bodies, which form the cement of society, if we do not heed what they are saying. I plead with the Home Secretary to change his mind on this issue.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: The hon. Gentleman has advanced an interesting and relevant argument. Why should we assume that those who are responsible for granting the licences have a better record or pedigree than those to whom they are granting the licences?

Rev. Ian Paisley: We have no assurance of that. We do not know whether those people have produced a certificate to get the job of issuing certificates. If the hon. Gentleman started to make inquiries into their pedigrees, a wall of steel would be erected to stop him finding out who they are.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid–Ulster): Does my hon. Friend agree that, because support for this issue crosses party boundaries, we should be able to vote on it and ensure that those iniquitous provisions are removed from the Bill? That would show that hon. Members are listening to their constituents. I hope that the Opposition will strongly support that proposition, because they should stand up for the voluntary organisations and those who have little money but a lot to contribute to society.

Rev. Ian Paisley: My hon. Friend has not been in the House as long as I have. He will learn that those who sit on the two Front Benches cannot be stopped, once they make up their mind. If their minds are made up to go to hell, to hell they will go, and no amount of preaching from me or anybody else will convert them.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton *indicated assent.*

Rev. Ian Paisley: My hon. Friend knows what hardened sinners they are, but even the most hardened sinner can repent. There is hope and forgiveness for all.

We are here tonight because alarm bells were sounded in another place. I am not in favour of the House of Lords or the hereditary principle. Nominees are even worse, because we do not know where fellows on the honours list have come from or what they have done. We cannot look at their pedigrees. Those in the other place who sounded the alarm bells the loudest were former Members of this place, who knew what was happening in the constituencies.

It is amazing that, in a country that has an established Church and had the benefit of the reformation—and where the Roman Catholic Church has not formed the doctrine of the state—the Home Secretary and the leader of the Labour party can approve the seal of the confessional. What is the seal of the confessional? If a Roman Catholic goes to his priest for forgiveness and repeats all his sins, the priest must not tell anyone what he says, even if he confesses that he intends to murder his next door neighbour or that he has already committed an atrocious crime.

What will it mean if some places may not be bugged? Anybody who has read Irish republican history will know that republican priests were used in all the rebellions.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

One active IRA priest was able to use his priestly authority to commit criminal acts that led to people being killed. I do not ask for any special privilege as the pastor of a large congregation. I know the secrets of many of my parishioners, but I believe that only God can forgive sins and I do not want to listen to their confessions.

A parishioner came to me once and confessed that he had committed a terrible crime. I got out my car and took him to the police station. I told the police that the man had committed a terrible crime and that the only way to clear his conscience was to make a clean breast of it. He did, he paid the price and he went to prison. He is out now and he often tells me that that was the best day's work I ever did, because his burden has been lifted and he no longer has to look over his shoulder and wonder what will happen to him.

I do not take it well when certain people say, "You cannot touch this," and, "You cannot touch that." I believe that the most private place of all is not any church building, but is in the recesses of a person's home when he sits with his family. That is a castle which should not be breached by this legislation. I do not think that any society should move lightly—as we seem to be doing in this Bill—to permit acts of burglary to install certain gadgets.

I do not believe that these gadgets will do what the Government expect. My office was, at one time, under surveillance. In reading the Bill, I had to smile when I read that I had been guilty of conducting myself with a large number of persons in pursuit of a "common purpose"—the "common purpose" being to do away with the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I thought that beams were being sent into my office, and I asked a technician—a member of my church—if he could tell me whether this was the case. He came down with a suitcase and produced all these gadgets, which he turned on. He then said he could see where the beams were coming from, and added that he could do something about it by pressing a button which would let the people sending the beam know that I was aware of it. He put the machine on, and the beam was gone. They got the message that I was breaking the beam and that I knew what they were doing. It would be nice to know from the Secretary of State whether he has the power to deal with that type of surveillance, because it could be the worst sort with which we have to deal.

These are the matters that affect me, and I think that the Bill should go to a Committee of the whole House where everybody from all parts of the United Kingdom could have a full say. I hope and trust that that will happen.

9 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Apart from a brief absence, I have been present to listen to all the speeches in this debate. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), as I wholeheartedly agreed with between 85 per cent. and 90 per cent. of his speech. The one particular message that was important was his reference to the constitutional importance of the legislation, and I support his view on this matter—that the Bill should be dealt with as a constitutional Bill on the Floor of the House.

One complaint that I have about the speech of the hon. Member for North Antrim is that he was far too charitable and courteous to the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), who opened his remarks by saying, "We must support the police"—implying that anyone not in the Lobby with the Home Secretary tonight would be against the police. That is an outrageous slur on hon. Members who wish to scrutinise legislation as well as do justice to the police. We need no lessons from him about supporting the police, and we wish to do a diligent job as hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge went on to refer to the civil liberties lobby as if they were loopy, but then complained—no doubt for local consumption—that his local police federation was concerned about some of the employment ramifications of the Bill. He also referred to the Worcestershire young farmers, who will be faced with enormous costs following this legislation. No doubt he will trot that out back home to show how strong and vigilant he has been in the Chamber. He should support the hon. Member for North Antrim and others who believe that there should be proper scrutiny of the legislation, The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge needs to be put in his place.

I certainly recognise that some aspects of the Bill have merit. For example, we need to protect youngsters who are members of voluntary organisations, and we certainly need to combat organised crime and the appalling growth of terrorism. Earlier, I spoke with the chief executive of the Scouts Association who stated that the Scouts and other charitable organisations had real concerns about the cost implications of the Bill, and about the fact that it will deter people from taking part in important youth work.

It is no good the Home Secretary, or indeed the shadow Home Secretary, saying that this is not a real problem. If there are costs for charitable organisations, we are duty bound to minimise them—if not avoid them. The House must address itself to that matter. For the record, the Scouts Association considers that if the legislation is unamended, vetting will cost the Scouts £500,000 a year.

We have heard the Home Secretary state that he wishes to repeal the so-called Weatherill amendment. There were indications in another place that the Government had argued that there would not necessarily be a duty to vet all volunteers who have access to children and young people. That fills the Scout Association and me with concern. There is demonstrably a need for proper vetting, but it should not impose disproportionate costs.

Equally, the Bill needs scrutiny to ensure that absurd provisions are not included. For example, a piano teacher with a regular group of young pupils will, as the Bill stands, have to apply for vetting. That shows how the Bill is ill conceived, ill thought out and ill prepared; it does no credit to the Home Secretary or to those who are prepared to let it pass without criticism today.

The one subject on which I reserve support for the hon. Member for Antrim, North concerns ministers of religion. I would not dispute his great knowledge of the reformation, but I am told by Anglican ministers that the Act of Uniformity 1662 reinforced the concept of what is described as the sacrament of confession in the Church of England. It is a matter of English law. Indeed, I am told that Anglican ministers are prohibited from treating the seal of the confession as anything other than sacrosanct. The sanctity of confession is therefore not a matter only of Roman Catholicism; it concerns English law in relation to the established Church.

Ministers of religion, when acting in that capacity, must have some privilege, whether they be rabbis, Roman Catholic priests, Anglican ministers, Methodist ministers—my local Methodist minister, the Rev. Bob Pritchard, in particular, is concerned about the matter—along with members of the Presbyterian Church and ministers of many other religions.

The Anglican Bishop of Bradwell reminded me—perhaps this backs up to some extent what the hon. Member for Antrim, North said in the latter part of his speech—that any prudent, self-respecting and dutiful minister of religion who is consulted by someone who is troubled in conscience and may have committed a heinous crime, will counsel that, if there is remorse, one must own up to one's wrongdoing or crime.

There must be many instances—we have no way of measuring—in which ministers of religion have helped the police and minimised the trauma and hurt that come from prolonged investigations, because people have taken their advice, owned up and demonstrated contrition.

Electronic surveillance of the confessional or of discussions with ministers of religion that are not described as confessional is not an absurd notion. There was a serious case of that in the past 12 months in the United States of America, which has the same common law system as we do. That incident has now been challenged in the courts there.

I have some sympathy with law enforcement officers, who come under political, public and professional pressure to try to get an arrest in the shortest possible time; that is their duty. If they have no limitation by statute on how they should conduct their inquiries they would almost be failing in their duties if they did not exploit every means open to them.

That is why there should be a specific exemption in the Bill—not in the code of practice—to ensure that the discussions of ministers of religion and others, including lawyers, counsellors and social workers, who receive confidential information in a professional capacity, are not trespassed on by electronic surveillance.

I know that others want to speak, but I have been here throughout the debate, which is not true of every hon. Member who has spoken or who is present at the moment. I want to express my grave disquiet about the way in which the legislative process of the Bill is being conducted.

The Bill has a big chunk missing, which will be contained in the code of practice. Earlier, I had occasion to complain that, for two or three days, I had been seeking from the Vote Office any supporting material to the Bill. However, nothing was available. Today, I discovered that a senior churchman had for some days had a copy of the code of practice.

I telephoned the Home Secretary's private office, and was told that no code of practice relating to surveillance was available. I expressed concern, and said that someone outside the House had a copy. The good gentleman I spoke to was somewhat embarrassed, and said that he would come back to me. Just before 1 o'clock, a code of practice was faxed to me.

To be candid, between then and the beginning of this debate, I did not have the opportunity to give it the scrutiny, understanding and reading that I would have liked. We then found that the draft code was still not available in the Vote Office. That is an outrage, and it shows what a charade our legislative process is. We pretend to A-level and university students that we give our legislation great scrutiny, but we do not.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), who is not in his place, told us that we could not deal with the matter on the Floor of the House because the general election is coming up soon. If one railroads legislation merely because of the impending general election, that demonstrates my point—we are not doing things properly, and our processes are being dictated by other considerations.

I am not prepared, therefore, to acquiesce in sloppy law making for anyone. I notice that the Opposition Front Bench is now vacant, which I regret. I was asked from a sedentary position whether I would like to serve on the Standing Committee that will consider the Bill. I do not mind doing so, but I give notice that I will seek to amend it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I do not want to put the hon. Gentleman in a difficult position, but it is possible that the new Parliament will have a Labour Government—I say not probable, but possible. Would the hon. Gentleman then insist that all constitutional matters were taken on the Floor of the House and not upstairs in Committee, as has been indicated?

Mr. Mackinlay: "Insist" is the wrong term. I do not have sufficient clout. I have made it abundantly clear, however, both inside and outside the House, that the tradition whereby constitutional issues are dealt with on the Floor of the House should not be abrogated. On previous occasions when both the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary have been pushing through legislation, I have also as a matter of record said that I did not think that the legislation was being given sufficient scrutiny. I do not vary my line. It has probably not done me a great deal of good, but I happen to believe that we in this House must jealously guard the proper scrutiny of legislation. That is not happening at this time.

How can I be satisfied that, by giving a nod and a wink to this legislation tonight, the code of practice will be sufficient? We will debate that code, which is bigger in volume and importance than a whole Act of Parliament, for one and a half hours, and it is wrong that it cannot be amended. For those reasons, I have no alternative but to demonstrate my deep concern about the way the House is behaving, and the only way I can do so is by joining the Liberals in the Lobby tonight.

9.14 pm

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak briefly. I understand that a number of my hon. Friends wish to speak.

My frustration is twofold. Many of the things that I would have wished to say in a considered way will inevitably be squeezed because of time constraints. My frustration is also due to the fact that there has been a total lack of comment about part IV of the Bill.

As the chairman of the all-party parliamentary information technology group, I must put this thought to the House. I believe that the battle against crime in the 21st century will be fought over information technology. Anyone who has visited the Metropolitan police, as our

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group did recently, will realise that crime now encompasses a vast range of factories producing forged credit cards, and also the Internet, which is used in the promotion of pornography and racial discrimination.

Information technology is used not only in objectionable ways but to further intelligence. It is good to note, thank heavens, that Scotland Yard is gearing up. PITO, the Police Information Technology Organisation, allows the co-ordination of forces up and down the country, and it means that there is a chance of success against highly organised technical crime. The recent paedophilia case arrests show how police have developed such skills. PITO is important.

I hope that the Minister will address those issues. The proposed organisation is worthy of serious consideration. It enables us to overcome a problem that has persisted for generations: police forces that could not talk to one another. Their information technology was not compatible, but there has been a sea change, which the Bill reflects.

I shall touch on one or two things that are going on, which PITO is designed to help co-ordinate. In particular, I shall highlight the wider issues that reflect on that organisation's work. There are moral and ethical questions, which the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists brought out in the House of Lords in a symposium earlier this week. Such issues were mentioned by Commissioner Sir Paul Condon in talking to groups in this House. He showed how the way in which his force and others around this country co-ordinate their activities is critical.

When I speak of this country, I refer to pilot schemes in Scotland and London designed to bring service directly to the great British public. It is not commonly recognised that more than a quarter of all calls by individuals on police stations are made to produce documents in connection with motoring offences. When one considers the time and dispersion of effort involved, it is clear that providing kiosks in public places for document recognition, use of the 999 system and to provide a range of emergency services are the sort of wider issues that the organisation can help to co-ordinate and drive on.

We have a national strategy for police information systems, which is the basis on which the organisation and the various forces will operate. However, the police national computer service, which began 20 years ago, is in many ways out of date. It must be brought up to date.

I want to mention briefly my police force in Sussex, which can claim to be at the forefront of the use of IT against crime. Its communications centre in Bognor Regis in my constituency has a state-of-the-art example of what can be done. The way in which it has been able to respond to emergencies, such as terrorist bombings in my constituency, has demonstrated that in practice. More widely, the Sussex police have shown exemplary zeal in pursuing modern technology—for example, in chasing stolen cars by satellite surveillance as they move from Britain to other parts of Europe.

It is on the wider aspect that I shall conclude. One of the major schemes with which the Met is concerned, and in which PITO can help British national interests, is the EU Telematics programme. That goes under the wonderful acronym of ATTACH, Advanced Trans-European Telematics Applications for Community Help. It is another example, like the kiosks, of the sort of work that will allow us to give the public a direct link to our police force. It is notable—I could quote several other cases—that half the funding for that scheme comes from a 4 million ecu scheme in the European Community. It is a positive case that should be taken into account among what I might call the welter of one-sided views of Brussels.

I could also cite the great hopes for GRASP—the global retrieval access and information system for property items. The greatest crime for the majority of our constituents is theft. The fact that there is another international scheme—again, half-funded through the European Community and involving this country, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Spain—will enable us to trace stolen goods through the greater application of data and imagery.

This subject could be developed far more widely than I have had the opportunity to do tonight. I am particularly concerned that PITO should not only be given a fair wind by the House, but that its operations and activities in the battle against IT crime should be seen for what they are—the real challenge to crime in the 21st century. This House has a role to play in that endeavour.

9.20 pm

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I wish to declare an outside interest: I am parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales in accordance with the Police Acts.

The federation is the largest police staff association in Britain; it therefore has a keen interest in the contents of the Bill. It represents constables, sergeants, inspectors and chief inspectors—in all, some 127,000 police officers. The Bill—especially the clauses that affect the federation's members—was drafted in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers. There has not been any real consultation between the Home Office and the Police Federation, although I was glad to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary say earlier that there would be consultation in future on the terms and conditions of employment of members of the police service.

The Government have given the federation some assurance that things will be all right on the night, so to speak, but the experience of the federation's members is that, unless their concerns are put on the record, these matters can be left to interpretation. With 43 forces and 43 chief constables, there are at least 43 possible interpretations, each different from the next. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to reflect and to consult with the federation before there are changes to its members' police regulations and complaints and discipline procedures.

All police officers carry out their duties under the auspices of the Police Regulations 1995. The regulations have been properly negotiated at the police negotiating board. The Bill suggests a change to those regulations for officers who work for the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service. However, any amendment to existing regulations to enable NCS and NCIS officers can be properly negotiated through the tried and tested police negotiating board machinery. If that is not done, there could be problems when officers from those bodies work alongside non-NCS and NCIS officers and different regulations apply to both groups.

The Government have indicated that all officers serving in those two important organisations will be volunteers. That may well be so, but let us consider the case of an individual who, when asked or recommended to apply for NCS or NCIS posts, indicates that such a move is not in accordance with his wishes. I have to ask, would he in fact be committing career suicide by refusing to take the post? Police regulations apply nationally to 43 different forces and cover officers who perform a variety of tasks, from traffic patrol to drug squad, and from domestic violence units to firearms officers. There is no reason why they should not apply to officers serving in the NCS or the NCIS.

There is also the important question of the discipline regulations, which are referred to in two parts of the Bill, in clauses 37 and 81. Undoubtedly, the general public must have confidence in the police service in this country to ensure that there is an effective rule of law. The general public equally need to feel confident that a proper, structured complaints system is in being if the service or its operators are perceived to be acting wrongfully.

All police forces operate within the same discipline code and discipline regulations. Similarly, the method for making any complaint is universal, and well established. The Bill appears to suggest that officers seconded to the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service will operate under a different discipline code and regulations. That may, I fear, cause confusion among members of the public. It might also create the impression that there is a lack of confidence in the existing complaints and discipline system.

There are practical problems. If an officer, for example, completes his or her duties at the NCS or the NCIS and is accused of a criminal act, does that officer have access to advice before responding to the allegations, as is the right of all people under the rule of law? Then there is the question, if that officer be found guilty and returned to his or her home force, will that finding of guilt be disclosable? How can fairness and equity for all be guaranteed when an officer is placed in that position? If the same officer is accused of a later disciplinary offence and appears before the chief constable of his own force, does that officer's antecedent contain a declaration of a finding of guilt from a different discipline code?

I therefore ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to reflect on those matters, and to give them careful consideration before the Bill is considered in Committee.

I shall briefly say two more things. The first concerns criminal records certificates. I do not welcome the widespread extension of those certificates throughout society, but I believe that, in today's debate, there has been a general misunderstanding of what is likely to happen when certificates are issued at the lower level.

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act—introduced, I well remember, as a private Member's Bill in 1974 by Mr. Piers Dixon, who was then the Member for Truro—provided that the period of rehabilitation be related to the length of the sentence passed on the offender, and the rehabilitation periods guarantee that spent convictions are expunged from the records and will not be provided in response to requests for the lower level certificates. The offences that are expunged range from imprisonment to youth custody, detention in a young offenders institution, corrective training and so on.

I therefore believe that there is less need for concern than has been suggested by the comments in tonight's debate that young people, especially, will be adversely affected if the Bill passes in its present form, because of the very important provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

I support the Bill. I believe that it is right to put the powers of the police into statute. The police welcome the Bill from that point of view, and I hope that it receives a Second Reading tonight.

9.27 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am grateful for the chance to catch your eye to make a brief speech.

I am sure that the whole House supports, as we have heard, the idea of legislation to give the police extra and more effective powers to fight crime, especially organised crime, by what are described, I understand, as firms of big time criminals. That is obviously in the public interest. In so far as the Bill is designed to achieve such a purpose, it definitely deserves a Second Reading tonight, and one which I hope will attract a good-sized majority.

However, when we legislate to provide extra powers for the police, as the Government have done on very many occasions in the past 18 years, we must always try to ensure that such measures are balanced by proper constitutional safeguards for the citizens of this country against the possibility of abuse of power by the forces of law and order. In that way, we can ensure that the practices of policing in this country remain justifiable in the eyes of our constituents and of the courts, and equally that the practices are effective in achieving the main purposes of preventing and detecting serious crime.

I do not have time to go into detail, but I hope to have a chance to develop my thoughts in Standing Committee. I have three principal concerns about the Bill and the ways in which it could still be improved. First, we need tighter and more justifiable definitions of serious crime than are in the Bill at present.

Secondly, the principle of prior independent authorisation should be followed as widely and as fully as possible in the legislation, and in so far as any exceptions are deemed absolutely necessary, they should be kept to a closely defined minimum.

Thirdly, the House should study and discuss fully the codes of practice to which we have heard reference, before the measure becomes law. We are all too well aware of the precedent of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. It took five years for the codes of practice to appear in all their glory, and a further six years thereafter for the revised edition to appear. That is intolerable, and that pattern must not be repeated in this case.

We in the House should be concerned not only to combat organised crime, but to preserve the civilised quality of policing and law enforcement in our society. We ought to be aware of the extent to which the nature of our society and its cherished freedoms can be degraded by oppressive and unreasonable police practices.

Ministers are to be commended for having rightly decided at last to put on a statutory basis police practices which hitherto have been unregulated by statute. We should do the job properly and completely while we are

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at it. Otherwise, we may all live to regret an important and timely opportunity to legislate in a truly responsible and balanced way.

9.31 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): With the news tonight that a British soldier has been killed in Northern Ireland, we should remind ourselves that the protection of the public from terrorism and crime is a serious and difficult business.

The public expect the police to have the powers to protect them and their families, and they expect us to protect their civil liberties. In other words, the public expect Parliament to resolve conflict between the principles of public safety and civil liberty. Both are important. The public do not expect Parliament as a whole or individual Members of Parliament to be for one and against the other. They expect us to deal with such tensions. That is the essence of political responsibility.

I am looking forward to the Committee stage of the Bill, because it is a substantial piece of legislation that addresses a number of long-standing concerns on which the Labour party has sought action. The issues raised in the House are important and varied, which is why this has been an excellent debate. In his thoughtful contribution, short though it was, the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) demonstrated that some of the important remaining concerns are shared by Conservative and Opposition Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made it clear that we will ensure that the Bill receives a Second Reading. We look forward to a constructive Committee stage. The Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), can be combative in debate, but he can also engage in constructive debate.

That is not as cosy as those who rarely visit the Committee Corridor seem to think. It is harder work for the Opposition and for Ministers to engage in reconciling issues and trying to find a way through some of the difficult problems that face this Parliament. Opposition is easy; constructive opposition, in which the Labour party is engaged, is hard work for both sides, but it represents the House of Commons at its best and it shows real democracy at work.

Incidentally, I was one of those who voted for the television cameras, radio and the press to be admitted to the proceedings of the House. That resolution covered the Committee Corridor—not just the attractive cross-examination that goes on in Select Committees but the work of Standing Committees. That important work deserves greater scrutiny by the press and the media.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) asked where the pressure for the Bill comes from. It comes from the Labour party, among others, because in our view it is unacceptable in a civilised society and democracy for intrusive surveillance to be undertaken by the loose conventions that have applied for the past 30 years, and applied under the Labour Government of which my right hon. Friend was a Cabinet Member. Nor is it acceptable for an organisation like the National Criminal Intelligence Service to lack corporate entity and be unaccountable, as it is now. It has loose accountability to the Home Secretary, but that is not practical day-to-day accountability; although the need for a national dimension to deal with crime is evident, it would not be right to set up a national crime squad without tying its activity back into the British tradition of local police accountability.

Those measures are contained in the Bill. We called for them and welcomed them when the Bill was published. There remain issues to be dealt with. It is right for hon. Members on both sides of the House to want to get the Bill right in respect of surveillance, and I am not surprised that that has been the most contentious issue under discussion.

That, however, is not helped by what my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) described as an apocalyptic view, which was illustrated by some hon. Members who spoke in the debate. On the other hand, several hon. Members, including the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) were right to say that we need to be careful to protect the confidentiality of client and lawyer or doctor and patient. As we go into Committee, we welcome the fact that Government and Opposition agree on the objective and are joined in the search for the right words.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton was right to reflect on the protection of volunteers and voluntary organisations, and to say that he had changed his views somewhat from the conclusion reached by his Committee. It is good that we should listen and learn, and I hope that that is how we shall continue on the Bill. It could be argued that the debate on the Bill is a good example of democracy in practice. Greater accuracy from the press and the media when they first started to look at the issues would have been helpful, but the debate in the House tonight has shown Members raising important issues on an informed basis.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) made some important points in a thoughtful speech about surveillance. He said that the subject of surveillance may know nothing about it, whereas one would know if one were having one's fingerprints taken. It is an important point and it is why a nominal oversight as proposed by the Liberal Democrats would not be adequate to meet the need to have a tight and specific oversight of the use of the powers proposed in the Bill.

In two interventions, my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) raised points that have not had great attention. She spoke about the regulation of data via mobile phones. As the reply of the Home Secretary, on whom she intervened, appeared to miss the point that she was making, I hope that the Minister of State will undertake to review the whole matter in preparation for the Committee stage. If the use of mobile phones is covered by the Interception of Communications Act 1985, will he ensure that the collection of information is undertaken in the same way as for telephones attached to land lines? If it is not so covered, will he deal with the problem and ensure that we understand the position? Will he also tell us the current legal position with regard to subscriber data? That information can identify the location of a mobile phone user to within some 50 yd, and a great deal more. I should have thought that it comes under the existing Act. Is that the case? I should be grateful if the Minister would clarify those points.

What is the position with regard to user data on land lines? As we all know from perusal of our own bills, a mass of information is available on our calls. Is that information protected from intrusion without some due process? If the Minister cannot answer tonight, will he undertake to give that information to the House or at least write to me, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn and my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley, to clear the matter up properly?

The Home Secretary had to take several interventions about where the Bill's consideration in Committee should take place, including a number of rather lengthy and convoluted contributions from his hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen). The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) made a similar point.

I am not sure that in all cases more is got out of a debate on the Floor of the House than in Standing Committee. The Committee stage is frequently the time when the most difficult issues are debated. Sometimes the Government are intransigent, as when we were debating the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill or the Police and Magistrates Courts Bill.

On other legislation, such as the Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Bill last week and, indeed, the Security Service Act 1996, there have been positive and constructive debates in Committee that improved and changed the legislation, precisely because the details could be teased out in the slightly different atmosphere of Committee sittings. Indeed, it was during the passage of the Security Service Bill last year that we called for independent police authorities to oversee the work of NCIS and the National Crime Squad.

It is interesting how the option of dealing with one bit of a Bill excites a number of hon. Members who rarely, if ever, participate in the detailed work of Standing Committees. The hon. and learned Member for Burton makes regular contributions in Committee, but he does not seem to expect to be on the Committee that will consider this Bill, which I assume is why he was so quick to offer a place on it to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West. I have to include the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in that, because there are occasions when the Liberal Democrats get bored very easily when they make appearances in Committee.

I stress the importance of careful examination in Committee. I hope that we will not reach the point where Standing Committees are regarded as unimportant. They are an important part of scrutiny to ensure that we get legislation right, and they should not be minimised, as some hon. Members have sought to do tonight.

The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) referred to concern expressed by the Police Federation that the same terms and conditions and the same discipline should apply to officers seconded to NCIS and the NCS. I am not clear—perhaps the Minister will help on this—whether there is an omission or intention in the Bill, but we need to get to the bottom of that matter in Committee, and consider amendments to tease out the situation or to clarify exactly whether change is being made. As a matter of principle, there should surely be only one police service in this country.

The hon. Member for Ryedale referred also to evidence given to the Home Affairs Select Committee, but I must point out the need to take care with that evidence. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn and I were puzzled by the evidence of the Association of Chief Police Officers and the regional crime squads, in which they appeared to be tell the Committee that they favoured the process of application to a circuit judge.

A careful reading of the evidence showed that that was the view expressed by the regional crime squads, not the Association of Chief Police Officers, which subsequently made it very clear to us that it did not share such a view. The problem that seems to have arisen is that the regional crime squads thought that it would be much easier to get the go-ahead from circuit judges than to get permission from chief constables, who turned out to be quite stringent about their applications. We need to be careful when we look at evidence to be sure that we have understood the reality behind it.

The hon. Member for Arundel (Sir M. Marshall) referred to part IV. I am glad that he did, because until that point I thought that I would be the only person to refer to it. Police information technology has indeed been a mess over the years. Some forces are better than others. I pay particular tribute to the Dyfed-Powys police—a small rural police force that is trying to make use of new technology, precisely to overcome the problems of distance and sparsity with which it has to deal. Co-ordination has been bad in the past. Chief constables have often been scathing about the lack of support for new technology development. That part of the Bill requires scrutiny in Committee, and we will seek to be satisfied that the structure will work, and will not be an arm's-length location for a different set of excuses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) made a series of points. I always listen to him with care, because he is a man of great principle and expresses genuine concerns. However, I think that he misunderstood a great deal of the Bill, and I offer him a private seminar, which would have been available to him before, had he expressed an interest.

The hon. Member for North Antrim referred to the confessional, and seemed to interpret that part of the Bill as referring to only the formal process of confession to a Roman Catholic priest. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) referred to it in much wider terms, and I think that he is right. I am not sure whether we have thought this matter through. The Home Secretary has clearly accepted the point in general terms, as with legal and medical confidentiality. It is a genuine matter for consideration in Committee to ensure that we get it right, so that the public can have confidence when they discuss personal issues with their minister of religion.

The code of conduct is very important. I appreciate the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock. In 1987, in the Committee considering the first major Bill in which I played some part as a Whip, I argued strongly that we could not deal properly with that legislation without the draft immigration rules. As Christmas approached, I asked for the draft and I presented the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton), with a gift-wrapped copy of the previous immigration rules. We knew that the draft existed—it was on his desk—but it was not published until the day after Third Reading.

[Mr. Alun Michael]

I commend the Minister for publishing the draft statutory instrument last year at the start of consideration of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Bill, because it enabled us to deal coherently with that measure. It greatly improved debate in Committee, and the legislation that came back to the Floor of the House as a result.

If the Bill is moving, it is a moving target. I understand the criticism, given that the original draft was not available in the Vote Office today; but that is a lesser evil than not seeing the statutory instrument. I ask the Minister to keep us up to date. A moving target is harder to work with, but it is better to have the Bill, even if we do not have the detail.

There has been limited opportunities in the debate to cover a wide range of issues. I look forward to discussing these matters further in Committee, and then returning to the Floor of the House with an improved Bill.

9.46 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): We have had a full debate on this important Bill. The threat from serious and organised crime is real and growing. We are not defenceless: the police and Customs and Excise have had many successes in tackling organised crime. I pay tribute to their work, but we must never become complacent.

We have heard much about the use of intrusive surveillance. The impression is sometimes created that the police will be able to conduct surveillance whenever and wherever they like. That is not true, and it will not be true under the Bill. Intrusive surveillance is used to investigate only serious crime, and only as a last resort.

Major criminals make use of every modern technique to cover their tracks. They have no hesitation in using modern equipment to render police surveillance ineffective. They change premises and lines of communication quickly and frequently to escape detection. They will literally be laughing all the way to the bank if the police are hampered in their use of effective surveillance techniques against them. The House must not allow that to happen.

Of course there is a balance to be struck between civil liberty and the fight against crime. The proposed arrangements will strike that balance. The use of intrusive surveillance will continue to be strictly controlled. There will be additional safeguards against possible misuse. I stress that law-abiding citizens will have nothing to fear, but those engaged in serious crime must have nowhere to hide.

A number of hon. Members were worried about the definition of serious crime. It is a wide-ranging definition, but it has to be, to ensure that police can mount operations at an early stage, before there is any certainty about the precise criminal charges that may result some or many months later.

It is important to remember that, in addition to the criteria in the Bill, the draft code of practice specifically provides that authorising officers should satisfy themselves that the degree of intrusion into the privacy of those affected by the surveillance is commensurate with the seriousness of the offence. Even if the police were minded to pursue some lesser criminals, under the provisions of the Bill the requirement for proportionality would bite on the type of operation that they could mount. The commissioners would, I am sure, respond to any failure to observe that requirement.

The definition has been around for many years. It has been used successfully under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 and, more recently, the Security Service Act 1996. It is clearly sensible to use the same test in regard to similar activities carried out by different bodies investigating the same type of crime.

The amendment expresses concern about criminal records. No provision in the Bill requires job applicants to produce a criminal conviction certificate. Such certificates are intended to be multi-purpose documents, issued only to individuals. They are likely to be used for purposes other than employment when individuals are required to produce a certificate of good conduct—for example, when applying for visas or permits to reside in foreign countries.

Unlike other certificates for which provision is made in the Bill, those certificates will disclose only information about convictions that are unspent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. It is open to any employer or organisation to seek that information, and the certificates will serve to confirm the accuracy of an individual's statement about his past. It will be for applicants and employers to decide when it is reasonable to produce a criminal conviction certificate.

I was astonished by the Liberal Democrats' concerns about NCIS and the National Crime Squad. I consider those concerns—articulated in their amendment—to be entirely without foundation. One of the Government's main aims was to ensure that the service authorities relating to NCIS and the National Crime Squad were fully consistent with the excellent tripartite arrangements that we have for policing, which provide proper local accountability.

The Bill already provides for police authority members of the National Crime Squad to be in the majority. Of the 17 members, nine will be representatives of local police authorities: nine out of 17 will be local authority members. NCIS is clearly a different kettle of fish from the National Crime Squad, because of its national responsibilities; even so, the Bill will provide for seven police authority representatives out of 19 members. That, I think, takes care of the Liberal Democrats' anxieties.

Hon. Members have raised a number of other concerns, relating to, for instance, police terms and conditions of employment. I paid particular attention to what was said by my hon. Friends the Members for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) and for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley). I intend to have another discussion with the Police Federation shortly—before the Committee stage, with luck—and I hope that I can assure the federation that its fears are groundless. I hope that I can assure my hon. Friends that theirs are as well.

Many hon. Members commented on volunteering and the cost of certificates—my right hon. Friends the Members for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) and for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), the hon. Members for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and, again, my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge. Let me tell my hon. Friend that I, too,

was a young farmer many years ago, and I do not share the concern expressed by the Worcestershire young farmers and others about the deleterious effect that the criminal conviction certificates or the criminal records agency provisions will have on those who volunteer to assist with young farmers' clubs. Nevertheless, we shall look forward to addressing those points in Committee, where I hope that we shall be able to reassure many more hon. Members.

Hon. Members also raised the question of security and destruction of unwanted material. Again, I look forward to giving reassurances in Committee about how that will be properly dealt with.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) asked about the technology for bugging. Once I discover how to work my own mobile telephone, I may become an expert on the technology to which he referred, but I understand that the reference in the Bill to interference with wireless telegraphy has nothing to do with remote surveillance. It is intended to cover the jamming of radio waves, for example, to prevent a criminal in a siege from hearing outside media broadcasts that could assist him. Others, however, may wish to deal with the hon. Gentleman's point about electronic surveillance in Committee.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) for his points on the codes of practice. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) also raised those points. To assist the House, we intend to have valid codes of practice available for Bills going through the Committee, if we can possibly do so. The code of practice has to be rewritten substantially because of the changes in the other place and we shall try to bring a fresh code before the House as soon as we can.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) made an interesting speech. I always enjoy listening to his speeches; one day I may have a chance to listen to one of his sermons. He rightly pointed out that, even when the hardened sinner repenteth, he should be forgiven, but, before I could point it out, he went on to say that it was only for God to forgive sins. I think that the Home Secretary and I had better go no further than criminal conviction certificates on this earth at the moment.

The hon. Member for North Antrim also suggested that the Bill was a constitutional measure that should be considered on the Floor of the House, but I remind the House that two other important Bills of this nature, the Intelligence Services Act 1994 and the Security Service Act 1996, were also taken in Standing Committee. They were not given that unique treatment.

I want to set the Bill in context. It is a key part of the Government's programme of law and order reforms, the results of which are making this country a safer place. Recorded crime in the 12 months to June 1996 was 10 per cent. lower than three years before. That is a fall of more than 500,000 offences, the largest three-year drop since records began in 1857. We are determined to fight crime effectively with full backing for the police, the support of the community, proper emphasis on crime prevention and severe punishment for serious, persistent and dangerous offenders. We have demonstrated that progress can be made.

Since 1978–79, total spending on the police has more than doubled in real terms. Next year, total expenditure on policing in England and Wales will be around £7.3 billion. Police authorities' spending power will be increased by £247 million, or 3.7 per cent. That includes extra funding for 2,000 more officers. There are now some 98,000 constables in England and Wales—more than ever before—and 16,000 more officers overall than when the Government came to power in 1979, but—this is of relevance to the debate—our commitment to law and order goes beyond ensuring that the police are properly resourced.

The Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 set out a new framework for the organisation and management of the police in England and Wales. That Act successfully introduced a new style of police authority, policing plans, objectives and key performance indicators. It is that model, which has worked so well, that forms the basis for the Bill's proposals for the National Crime Squad and NCIS.

We have also continued to ensure that the police have the right tools to do their job, exploiting new technology to the full. We have established the world's first DNA database and we have more than 3,300 matches. The police national network has drastically improved communications between police forces, and the new national automated fingerprint identification system will lead to a 430 per cent. efficiency increase in the number of identifications of fingerprint marks recovered from crime scenes. The creation in the Bill of the police information technology organisation will build on those achievements.

Strengthening the police is not enough on its own. Only 16 months ago, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced our intention to bring the Security Service into the fight against organised crime. The Security Service Act achieved that, and this Bill will complete the package of measures that he announced.

We have also taken steps to ensure that the police can properly investigate crime. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 modified the right of silence for someone being questioned by the police. Initial research suggests that there is a 50 per cent. drop in suspects staying silent at the police station.

Therefore, our commitment to the fight for law and order continues. We have brought a comprehensive package of measures before this Parliament, intended to make this country a safer place in which to live and work. The Crime (Sentences) Bill, which goes before another place tomorrow, is designed to provide real protection for the public against some of the most serious, dangerous and persistent offenders in our society. We are also taking action, through the Sex Offenders Bill, against those who perpetrate vile crimes against children and commit other sex offences.

Today we are considering the Police Bill, which is part of the Government's overall package. It will strengthen the fight against organised crime and protect the most vulnerable members of our society. The creation of NCIS and the National Crime Squad will establish nationally focused organisations to combat organised crime. We will put intrusive surveillance on a clear statutory basis, but one which protects the civil liberties of our people. We will ensure that the police have access to 21st-century technology in the fight against crime.

[Mr. David Maclean]

The Police Bill will have real practical benefits in the fight against crime. I urge the House to vote against the wrecking amendment tabled by the Liberal Democrats, and to give the Bill a Second Reading. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 41, Noes 264.

Division No. 75] **[10 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Etherington, Bill
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Harvey, Nick
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McCrea, Rev William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Paisley, Rev Ian
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Liz Lynne and
Mr. Simon Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon [redacted]
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'd)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony

Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangf'd)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Rev. Ian Paisley.]*

Question negatived.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee.

POLICE BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Police Bill [Lords], it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State attributable to the provisions of the Act,

(b) any compensation payable, by virtue of the provisions of the Act, by the Commissioners of Customs and Excise, and

(c) any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment; and

(2) the payment of any sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Pensions

That the draft Register of Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Question agreed to.

TRANSFER OF CROFTING ESTATES (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*]

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E(2) (Scottish Grand Committee (Bills in relation to their principle)),

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, at the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee on Monday 17th February, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)), the Chairman shall put any Question necessary to dispose of any Motion which may be made in relation to the Transfer of Crofting Estates Bill [Lords] at half-past Two o'clock, if not previously concluded.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

PETITION

Pembrokeshire Ambulance Service

10.15 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I am here to present a petition that has been signed by more than 60,200 people in Pembrokeshire.

The humble petition of the people of Pembrokeshire sheweth,

that the proposal to end local control of the Pembrokeshire Ambulance Service by merging it with the West Wales Ambulance Trust will lead to increased costs and a significantly reduced quality of service.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable house call on the Secretary of State for Wales to reject any proposal to merge the Pembrokeshire Ambulance Service and the West Wales Ambulance Trust.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc."

To lie upon the Table.

Basking Sharks

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

10.16 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): It is with some trepidation that I raise the issue of the quinquennial review of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, especially the consideration of the listing of the basking shark as an endangered species, although I am grateful for the opportunity to do so. I raise it with trepidation because, as you may have noticed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituency is a long way from the sea, although we have a very good canal system, so the sea is not totally inaccessible. Every attempt so far to put the basking shark on the endangered species list has failed. The time has come for action by the House.

In the long time that I have been involved in campaigning on various environmental issues, I have met many local people in environmental organisations and wildlife and countryside groups who are convinced of the soundness of the case for the basking shark to be listed under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They have convinced me, and I hope that, when the Secretary of State makes his decision on 1 April, all the efforts on behalf of the basking shark will have been successful.

I wonder whether it is an accident that the basking shark has been left off the list so far, because it is bizarre that such a species has not been afforded the same protection as the red squirrel and other animals. Speaking to many different environmental groups led me to find out more about the basking shark. I wanted to discover exactly what kind of creature it is and why it is facing the threat of extinction.

Unlike the killer whale, the basking shark is a gentle giant. I understand from those who follow this matter closely that it was a common creature in our coastal waters and was bound up with folklore. It used to arrive in the Isle of Man waters during the hot summer days around May, but nobody knew where it went in September. There is scope for more scientific experiments to gain an understanding of how this creature lives.

There has been a marked reduction in sightings of the basking shark, particularly around the coast of the Isle of Man. The basking shark project in the Isle of Man—which is run by Ken Waterson and various volunteers and is supported by the Isle of Man Government—has raised concerns about this. There is a fear that the basking shark faces a real threat of extinction. We understand that the population status of the basking shark is unknown, and we know that its biological characteristics—including a slow growth rate—make it more susceptible to exploitation.

I shall deal briefly with the role of the Isle of Man Government. Under Manx legislation, the basking shark is already afforded protection, and that protection is based on the work of the basking shark project. The next logical step was for the Isle of Man to apply to the United Kingdom Government for appendix II status under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species at the next round of negotiations, which I understand will take place in Zimbabwe in June this year. The application from the Isle of Man exposed the nonsense that this creature is free to bask in Isle of Man waters, but not in United Kingdom waters beyond the Isle of Man limits.

Fortunately, we have not had a constitutional crisis on this, and I am glad to recognise that the Government have gone some way to making amends. I understand that the Isle of Man will be formally included in the delegation to Zimbabwe, and that Ken Waterson may be part of it. I look forward to being kept informed of the progress that is being made. It is important that the United Kingdom delegation should be able to contribute to the sharks working party which will meet under CITES. The whole episode has demonstrated our failure to get the basking shark on to the CITES appendix II list, and that has highlighted the real fiasco that we now face.

I want a commitment from the Minister that the Government will match the commitment from the Isle of Man, and that they will consider the basking shark under wildlife and countryside legislation. I want the Government to go further, and to discuss whether the Isle of Man, Jersey and other islands should have a say when we deliberate nature and conservation. I am not asking for the islands to play a full part, but it is essential that the Isle of Man should be included. I hope also that the Minister recognises that—in addition to the lack of scientific evidence—an obstacle to all this is the embarrassment of the Government being asked to negotiate internationally on what they were not prepared to do at home as recently as 10 January.

The real obstacle is the Government's unwillingness to take the precautionary approach. There would have been a different outcome to the application by the Isle of Man on 10 January to list the basking shark if the Government had accepted the precautionary approach and the recommendation of various organisations in previous reviews of the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

We want the Minister to give a commitment to the precautionary approach tonight. After all, the Government—whichever Government—of the day hold all endangered species in trust for tomorrow, for our children and grandchildren. It is the duty of Governments to ensure that biodiversity is maintained in United Kingdom waters. The Minister cannot pick and choose which threatened species to include, and an excellent case has already been made for the basking shark.

We should be doing far more to strengthen the Wildlife and Countryside Act. It is a question not only of which species are threatened by deliberate acts—trade, hunting and so on—but of the way in which we honour our obligations under the Berne convention and the habitats directive. We also need to protect threatened species effectively from the incidental results of lawful operations, whether in hedgerows, the seas, or anywhere else.

Perhaps the Minister will cast some light on why he has failed to accept the precautionary approach and on the reasons for previous recommendations being overturned. I have met a range of people through my concern for the basking shark, including the chairmen of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and of English Nature.

Will the Minister expand on where he expects objections to come from in the consultation exercise that he has recently undertaken? Is it the case that the Scottish Office and market forces have been given greater priority than the protection of endangered species such as the

basking shark? Why has the Scottish Office had such a large say, when so many people have acted in the best interests of the basking shark?

Is the Department of the Environment perhaps out of step with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? I am grateful to have the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), the Labour spokesman on fisheries and agriculture. Does the Minister have any knowledge—this is pure speculation and fantasy—of whether the Government have traded 100 tonnes of basking shark liver oil for an as yet undetermined quota for United Kingdom fishing of white fish in Norwegian waters?

I hesitate to put that to the Minister, but I am trying to work out why the basking shark has already been rejected twice for listing. Is it an accidental oversight or is there some bizarre reason? I would welcome an assurance that there is no prospect of Norwegian whaling boats sailing around the Isle of Man, or anywhere in the Irish sea—even up to the Wirral—and harpooning basking sharks. It would be helpful to know what exactly is the current understanding with Norway, and whether at some future stage Norway could fish our basking sharks in return for a white fish quota agreement.

I urge the Minister to take account of what I believe is overwhelming support for the protection of the basking shark. Support has been expressed by English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Marine Conservation Society, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature shark specialist group and the basking shark project in the Isle of Man.

I must pay tribute to the tireless work done by Ken Waterson in the surveillance of basking sharks. Indeed, he has brought together volunteers from all over the world to try to keep tabs on what is happening. The Manx Government, the English Wildlife Trust, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and the university of Liverpool have also expressed support. Will the Minister note that that is more support than for any other species proposed for protection in the review?

When the Minister reaches his decision, will he also take into account the JNCC, which has put forward proposals yet again to the Department of the Environment and does not want them to be overturned once again?

Finally, there is concern that failure to protect the basking shark within the framework of our domestic legislation has implications for the undertakings that we have given on biodiversity internationally. The species has been assessed as globally vulnerable under the IUCN red list of endangered species criteria. Other countries are already accepting that it requires protection. The United Kingdom should be playing a leading role in all this. Whatever cuts are being made to the budgets of English Nature—those cuts should not be being made at all—money should be found properly to fund and co-ordinate scientific research.

More help should be given to projects such as the basking shark project in the Isle of Man. If endangered species status is granted for the basking shark on 1 April when the results are known, I hope that the Government will involve themselves in extensive monitoring and be in a strong position to play a leading part in international discussions.

I urge the Minister to heed the warnings that we have been given and to take account of the significant number of Members of Parliament who signed the early-day motion calling for action based on the precautionary principle—action already taken by the Isle of Man Government. I hope that, for the basking shark at least, it will be a case of third time lucky when the Government's decision is made in April.

10.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) has raised an important subject, in which there is wide interest. She need not feel any trepidation about raising the subject, as there is such interest in it; I acknowledge that she has taken a consistent interest in the status of the basking shark.

I shall deal with the position as far as the quinquennial review of schedules 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is concerned, but first I shall briefly consider the wider context in which the hon. Lady set out this important issue. She will know of the active part that the Government play in the operation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

While I understand that she is disappointed that the United Kingdom was unable to propose listing of the basking shark in appendix II of CITES—a decision that we think was soundly based on the Government's view that the proposal would not have met the internationally agreed criteria for listing a species in the appendix—I am grateful for the welcome she gave the incorporation of an Isle of Man representative on the UK delegation at the next CITES conference of the parties in June. I am sure that that arrangement will enable the issue to be discussed fully in the conference and its working groups, with additional expert knowledge and interest.

I am sure that the hon. Lady will also welcome the part that the Government's biodiversity initiative is playing, our response under our Rio commitments, and the fact that the basking shark is one of a considerable number of UK species whose status will be monitored by the UK biodiversity group in the next five years. We certainly believe that the current quinquennial review exercise will be helpful in that process and will assist the group in submitting its next report.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the EU habitats and birds directives. As she knows, we are playing a full part in responding to those European commitments on top of our other international commitments.

The 1981 Act is the primary Act for conservation in Great Britain. The JNCC began work on the third and current quinquennial review in 1995. Between mid-1995 and mid-1996, the JNCC sought the views of relevant scientists and non-governmental organisations to arrive at a list of 34 recommendations. The recommendations were that one animal, the bugloss moth, should be removed from schedule 5 and that 12 animals should be added to it; four animals already on schedule 5 should receive increased protection; 17 plants should be added to it. The basking shark is one of the animals recommended for addition to schedule 5.

The Government intend to be as open as possible in our consideration of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's recommendations. To this end, a public consultation exercise began on 29 January. The consultation period expires on 1 April. I am sure that hon. Members will recognise that, until the exercise is

[Mr. James Clappison]

concluded and the views of all interested parties have been considered, it is impossible to predict whether the recommendations will be supported and acted on. Although I can give no indication of the likely outcome of our consideration of the JNCC's recommendations in respect of any of the 34 species concerned, I feel that I should respond to the concerns raised by the hon. Lady about the basking shark.

In its current recommendation, the JNCC claims that there is still inadequate data on the population status and vulnerability of the basking shark. As the hon. Lady said, it is a gentle creature and I believe that it is our largest fish. However, it can be vulnerable. She suggested that protection was justified on the basis of the precautionary principle. The lack of clear, comprehensive scientific data for the species in British waters makes the task of assessing the merits of the case difficult.

The shark was similarly recommended by the JNCC's predecessor, the Nature Conservancy Council, in earlier quinquennial reviews of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in 1986 and 1991. Insufficient data about or evidence of an immediate threat to basking shark populations in UK waters meant that it was not listed for protection after those reviews. In its current recommendation, the JNCC recognises that the basking shark is notoriously difficult to monitor, with few verified records. The notable exception, as the hon. Lady said, is the Isle of Man waters.

It has been long been accepted that the primary threats to the species are, first, directed fisheries and, secondly, accidental disturbance and capture by man. Evidence from around the world suggests that where the species is targeted, it suffers severe declines from which it may not recover. At present, there is no UK basking shark fishery. The hon. Lady mentioned the position with Norway. Norway has a quota to take 100 tonnes of basking shark liver from UK waters. Only 5.8 tonnes, or roughly 15 basking sharks, were recorded in 1993, and nothing was taken in 1991, 1992, 1994 or 1995.

Evidence of damage to or loss of stocks commonly cited relates to directed fisheries in Canada during the 1950s and in Ireland between 1947 and 1975. Similar findings have been made in other shark fisheries off California and Florida. It is important to remember that such declines were the result of targeted fisheries and occurred in waters some distance from the United Kingdom, where different climates, both of population and meteorology, exist.

Ms Walley: Does the Minister agree that, while sightings are not scientific data as such, the evidence from the Isle of Man over five years has been of a drastic reduction in the number of sightings? We should take account of that surveillance, because fewer sharks are being seen.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Lady has made an interesting point, and we shall consider the position scientifically during the consultation. We welcome views and evidence coming forward as part of the debate and during the consultation period.

The impact of accidental capture, or by-catch, of basking sharks in fisheries targeting other species is less clear. To date, British voluntary fisheries recording schemes have provided no evidence of incidental capture of basking sharks in nets deployed for other marine stocks.

What is clear is that there appears to be a relative lack of robust scientific evidence concerning the basking shark in British waters and further afield within the north-east Atlantic region. It would appear appropriate, therefore, to investigate further the data available for the basking shark before reaching any conclusions. In part, the public consultation exercise will facilitate such a review.

Additionally, however, I would anticipate—this responds to the hon. Lady's point—that it will be necessary to hold one or more focused meetings to ensure that the Government consider all available information and evidence before reaching any decision. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to welcome the work that the hon. Lady has done to stimulate a debate on this species. I am sure that she will want to work with my Department to ensure that all the facts are made available as part of that debate.

Having spent some time discussing the basking shark specifically, I remind colleagues that the approach that I have outlined and that the Government will be taking to ensure that an informed and appropriate decision is taken in respect of the basking shark will also be applied to all the other 33 species subject to the JNCC's recommendations. The Government will be open in their considerations and would welcome information from all interested and affected individuals and organisations.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I listened carefully to what the Minister said about the Norwegian quota, and I accept his description of the take over the years. However, in the context of abiding by the precautionary principle that was laid out so clearly by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley), would the Minister, from his Department, be prepared to recommend to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that the fishery for basking sharks should be closed until more information is collected on the status of the basking shark and the effect on populations around the UK coast?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman's point speaks for itself. He will agree that we have to look at the evidence and debate it before we can reach conclusions such as the one that he suggests, but I hear what he says in that respect.

I hope that, once the formal public consultation exercise concludes on 1 April 1997, we shall be able to reach a consensus decision on each species so as to enable those species which require additional protection to be added to schedule 5 or 8 as soon as possible thereafter.

In the course of this short debate, I hope that I have been able to reassure the hon. Lady about the rigour of our approach towards protecting this important species and other species under the auspices of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, our other commitments under the Rio convention and our European commitments, under which we are protecting much of our animal life and biodiversity.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Endangered Species

1. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to make additional resources available to Customs and Excise to combat trafficking in endangered species and products. [14169]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): The control of endangered species is a priority, and one to which I give my strongest support. Customs has just increased the staffing of the specialist Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species enforcement team at Heathrow airport.

An important issue is to increase public awareness of the problem to prevent unintended imports. To that end, Customs and Excise—in partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Department of the Environment—is providing an endangered species video which most, although not all, of the airlines we have asked have already agreed to show in-flight, and I hope that others will follow suit.

Mr. Banks: First, I pay tribute to the work of Customs and Excise in trying to stamp out the trade in endangered species and wildlife products. I also thank the Minister for his commitment to the cause.

What specific resources are made available for the training of staff so that they can recognise the products that are coming in? Will there be an increase in specifically allocated staff? Clearly, the trade is now so large and growing that we need more people doing the job. The Minister referred to the CITES team at Heathrow. Will that model be extended to other airports, such as Manchester?

Finally, what is being done to stop the illegal importation of bear bile, rhino horn and tiger bone products, which are coming into this country for traditional Chinese medicine shops and are now available in London?

Mr. Oppenheim: The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions, all of them important. Each of the 14 customs regions now has an expert CITES liaison and intelligence officer. The team at Heathrow—which has just been expanded to eight people—is the only dedicated team, but all other customs areas are being given training and computer-aided recognition systems so that they can recognise snake skins and other products. We wish to increase resources in that area.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Chinese medicine, and I agree that no nation can be complacent about this matter. In addition, no nation has an unblemished record on the issue. There is a particularly serious problem worldwide with Chinese medicines and aphrodisiacs. It is sad paradox that the most populous nation on earth sometimes seems determined to wipe out the last rhino because some of its menfolk seem incapable of performing. That is sad and ironic.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Reverting to a serious aspect of this important question, what is my hon. Friend doing—apart from providing manpower—to educate the public about the dangers of bringing in endangered species, as this seems to be the crux of the situation?

Mr. Oppenheim: The Government are developing a package of leaflets, posters and videos, with the help and support of wildlife and animal welfare groups. Almost all the travel agents and tour groups that we have approached have agreed to send these out with tickets, and to send posters to their reps abroad. Most of the airlines that we have asked have agreed to show the videos on their flights, including British Airways. The only major UK airline not to have agreed yet is Virgin Airways which, when reminded, said that Mr. Branson was currently too busy to respond.

Share Ownership

2. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to promote wider share ownership; and if he will make a statement. [14170]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Jack): In addition to the recent changes made to the three tax-approved employee share schemes, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has issued a challenging target to our largest businesses that he would like to see half their employees holding shares in their own companies by 2000.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of my constituents own shares in the companies for which they work and that many also own shares in privatised utilities that operate locally, such as Railtrack, British Telecom, British Gas and Anglian Water? Does he agree that those shareholders need confidence and that the one thing that would destroy that confidence would be a windfall tax which, apart from possibly being illegal, would amount to a straightforward confiscation of wealth from small shareholders?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is right. If we follow what the shadow Chancellor said on the "Today" programme, it would be the equivalent of levying another 2p in tax. The shadow Chancellor's explanation on the radio this morning of the windfall tax was a cynical attempt to dodge the issue. He must have briefed the legal advice that he claims to justify it with all the details about the tax, so why does he not come out and tell the truth about which of the companies to which my hon. Friend referred

would be affected, how much would be raised and who would pay? My hon. Friend is right to postulate uncertainty about the tax.

Mr. Corbett: As the Minister made a plea for truth, will he tell us how the Government propose to pay for their share match scheme, which we are told is intended to spread wider share ownership? Will he give the House an assurance that it will not be done by extending value added tax on food, children's clothing, public transport, and so on? If he will give that undertaking, will he say where the money will come from to pay for it?

Mr. Jack: I would be happy to give a straight answer to that question, in contrast to the efforts of the shadow Chancellor to dodge any question about the windfall tax. The share match scheme requires a change in the regulation of an already existing mechanism in the approved profit-sharing scheme, and we are considering how precisely to achieve that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a windfall tax could be considered an increase in price for the vital necessities of life, such as gas, electricity and water? Will not the increase therefore bear down most heavily on pensioners and those on low incomes?

Mr. Jack: For the shadow Chancellor to smile at the conclusion of my hon. Friend's question shows his cynical disregard for pensioners, who would have to pay for the tax—which could cost households about £100 a year—but he will not come clean on it. My hon. Friend has exposed the Opposition's cynical attempt to raise money through a utilities tax.

Mr. Darling: Is it not clear that the Conservatives are not particularly bothered about pensioners, but are keener to climb into bed with the boardroom fat cats? Does the Financial Secretary recall that it was the Tory party that pioneered the windfall tax in 1981, and that the idea was supported by the chairman of the 1922 Committee? If the Financial Secretary is in the business of giving straight answers, can he confirm—given that stability, more than anything else, affects share ownership—that the Chancellor will meet his inflation target of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. by the end of this Parliament?

Mr. Jack: Let me say to the hon. Gentleman, who has just put up another smokescreen to dodge answering questions about the windfall tax, that it is not only fat cats who would have to pay: many pensioners and people on low incomes would be the victims of the windfall tax. The hon. Gentleman knows what my right hon. and learned Friend's target is; he is confident of meeting it.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that not only shareholders but pensioners would suffer from the introduction of a windfall tax, because the fundholders of pension schemes invest heavily in the privatised utilities? Will he further confirm that the costs of the utilities for consumers are bound to go up in the event of a windfall tax, simply because, if the prices were too high now, the regulators would have intervened to force them down? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is right. Opposition Members scoff, but Professor Littlechild, the electricity regulator, told a Commons Select Committee that he would have to take into account the windfall tax and its effect on utility prices when prices came to be set in the future. There can be no stronger endorsement of the line that my hon. Friend took. All the speculation and concern of Conservative Members are the direct result of the cynical attempt by the shadow Chancellor to dodge putting on the record the information that he gave to Mr. Beloff, who is said to have provided a legal opinion justifying his tax. He should make it public and be answerable for it.

Value Added Tax

3. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations have been made to him about recent levels of VAT receipts. [14171]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I receive a large number of representations on this and other subjects.

Ms Eagle: Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer explain how many times his Government have extended the scope of VAT and increased its rate since 1979?

Mr. Clarke: That would involve the history of many Budgets. The Labour party has committed itself to our spending plans. It has obviously belatedly come around to approving the Government's fiscal policy. As far as I know, it is making no commitments to reduce any tax. Instead, it proposes to introduce a windfall tax, about which it is singularly unable to answer any questions but which would add to the tax burdens of many households.

Sir Terence Higgins: On the collection of VAT and other Customs and Excise taxes, has my right hon. and learned Friend seen the article in the *Financial Times* the day before yesterday and the leader in the early editions of the *Evening Standard* yesterday that suggest that clauses 51 to 54 of the Finance Bill would make it possible for customs to take money direct and forthwith from bank accounts and, if people have no money in their bank accounts, from other people who owe them money? Is that story true? If it is, does he appreciate that that would not be acceptable?

Mr. Clarke: I, too, read the article in the *Financial Times* and the editorial of the *Evening Standard*, as did my colleagues. I discussed it with my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary, among others. We are aware of the concerns and are considering them. I am not sure that I totally recognise the proposals in the newspaper reports, but I do not dismiss them.

Sir James Molyneaux: On the July capping of VAT refunds, will the Chancellor of the Exchequer give sympathetic consideration to the settlement of claims that had been accepted and promised before the announcement was made in July?

Mr. Clarke: We are carefully examining that. My hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary will take a close interest in the matter. Where people were promised refunds in writing before July, I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we will honour those promises.

Mr. Garnier: My right hon. and learned Friend will have seen the posters put up by the Labour party advertising that the Government are to put up VAT on fuel. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that Opposition Members are listening. The mistake was mine. I meant VAT on food. Has my right hon. and learned Friend also heard that Labour proposes to abide by all our tax and spending plans? Does it follow that Labour advocates VAT on food?

Mr. Clarke: I very much doubt whether my hon. and learned Friend will get an answer to a question of that sort from the Labour party. I have no plans to impose VAT on food. I have never had any such plans. The Labour party knows perfectly well that I have not had any plans to impose VAT on food. The people who put up the poster did not believe it. The Labour party should advertise the answer to a straightforward question: will a windfall tax be imposed on British Telecom and on our telephone bills? We already know that it will be a tax on fuel, to go back to my hon. and learned Friend's slip of the tongue.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer acknowledge that his inability to forecast VAT receipts correctly is a significant factor in his inability to get borrowing down? Unless the situation has improved, does he accept that one way that would immediately help to bring down the cost of borrowing would be to make the Bank of England independent and, as a result, reduce the base of interest rates by between 0.5 and 0.75 per cent. and Government debt by £1.4 billion this year, according to the Library?

Mr. Clarke: First, estimates of VAT are always difficult. Treasury estimates have been going wide of the mark for some years, since about 1990. The hon. Gentleman will know that we set out the reasons for that in the Red Book. We have introduced measures to deal with many of them in the current Finance Bill, including a three-year cap on retrospective claims. We have also taken steps to improve collection. We have in hand the task of getting right the estimates of receipts, although it will always be difficult.

With regard to making the Bank of England independent, I believe that the present arrangements work extremely well. I find myself subjected to more debate than we used to have on the subject, because I made the process transparent by ending Treasury editing of the Bank's inflation report and by publishing regular minutes. The Governor and I are agreed that there is only a small difference of judgment between us—of one quarter of 1 per cent. He thinks that I put a little too much emphasis on the present strength of sterling and I think that he puts a little less emphasis on the strength of sterling than he should. We will continue to consider the matter. We are both confident that we will hit the target and maintain the best inflation record that Britain has had for 50 years. The Governor's own forecast—the one that caused all the dispute—estimates that inflation will fall to $2\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. in the latter half of this year.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I revert to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). Will my right hon. and learned Friend go just a little further and give an unequivocal undertaking that the forecast in the *Financial Times* will never come to pass while he is Chancellor?

Mr. Clarke: We will have to consider what the *Financial Times* said. I have very high respect for that newspaper, but I will not sign up immediately to its assertions of what will follow. However, we are looking closely at those clauses of the Finance Bill and reflecting on the concerns raised in the *Financial Times*. Were those concerns fully borne out, we would wish to address them, but I do not want to concede the whole way until we have given more thought to them.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor confirm that the commitments that he has just made on VAT on food were exactly the same commitments that the Prime Minister made on VAT on fuel in 1992 and then cynically broke? Given that VAT receipts depend on levels of spending and inflation, will the Chancellor repeat the commitment that he made before—that inflation would be at or below $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. by the end of the Parliament? Will he repeat that promise, or is it yet another Tory broken promise?

Mr. Clarke: My recollection is that, at the last general election, a poster went up showing my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) dressed as "VAT man", in a Batman costume. The public were told by the then Labour spokesman, who did not believe a word that he was saying, that we had plans in the pipeline to increase VAT to $22\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. A great deal of debate took place on that. Most of the quotations on which the Labour party relied were in response to a subordinate plot to that. It was a deceitful and incorrect campaign, which was never borne out by the facts.

Will the right hon. Gentleman take the opportunity to answer a straight question about a tax which he has told everyone he proposes to introduce in a few weeks, if he gets the chance? Will I and every household in the country face the consequences of a windfall tax if it is imposed on telephone bills and British Telecom?

Public Expenditure

4. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average public expenditure per head in (a) Scotland and (b) England in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [14172]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. William Waldegrave): In 1994-95—the last year for which figures are available—identifiable public expenditure per head was £4,505 in Scotland and £3,614 in England. This provision for Scotland is some 20 per cent. higher than the United Kingdom average.

Mr. Luff: In the event of the creation of a Scottish Parliament, it would have full control of public

expenditure in Scotland and could levy a tartan tax, while Scottish Members continued to be over-represented in this Parliament of the United Kingdom and could vote on English public expenditure and tax levels. How does my right hon. Friend think that I could justify that enormous differential to my constituents?

Mr. Waldegrave: With difficulty. The inevitable consequence of Labour's ill-thought-out plans, leaving aside the fact that they would be divisive between England and Scotland in many other ways, would be that the House would want to look at the basis of the financial deal between Scotland and England. There would be no way of stopping that, and it would not be to the benefit of Scotland.

Mr. Sheldon: Is the Chief Secretary aware that the Barnett formula, which was formulated by Lord Barnett, then Chief Secretary, when he and I were at the Treasury, was based on the population of Scotland? It was decided that it represented a fair allocation for the people of Scotland as a percentage of the total of Government expenditure throughout the United Kingdom. This is a serious matter. Is the Chief Secretary aware that, if we were to change that formula for any political considerations, it would cause serious danger to the unity of our country?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am very familiar with the formula, which is, of course, based not only on population but on an assessment and an attempted assessment of need. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff), and it is a little odd for the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) to say it, it is the right hon. Gentleman's party, the Labour party, that is putting forward proposals that are liable to threaten the arrangements between England and Scotland. It is his party that is putting the Union in danger. One of the least of the consequences of those proposals—although an extremely important one to the people of Scotland—would be that people in England would want to look at the figures with increased attention.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend understand that Scottish Members, too, are equally concerned about what they can say to their constituents? As I understand it, the Barnett formula is designed to remove progressively and slowly the differences in expenditure levels between parts of the United Kingdom, particularly Scotland and England. The Labour party proposes to change that virtually overnight; we would be faced with what could only be described as the most unfair proposals ever brought before Parliament, because they would mean that Scots would be running the Westminster Parliament and making decisions on English spending matters, and Scots would be running the Edinburgh Parliament and making decisions on Scottish spending matters, but English Members of Parliament would not be able to influence either.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I remember that, when I was Secretary of State for Health, my then opposite number, the current shadow Foreign Secretary, put that almost as eloquently as my hon. Friend has done; it has received no answer in the very badly thought out plans that the Labour party has since introduced. Those proposals would be disastrous for the Union, and also disastrous for Scottish taxpayers and for the standard of living in Scotland.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Given that public expenditure on agriculture affects every taxpayer in England and Scotland, will the Chief Secretary confirm that £3.3 billion, or the equivalent of 2p on income tax, is the sum needed to deal with bovine spongiform encephalopathy? Is that a minimum or a maximum figure?

Mr. Waldegrave: As far as I remember, the figures over two or three years are about £1.5 billion this year and then there will be a considerable refund from the European Union. The figures are set out and separately identified in the Red Book.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that public expenditure per head in Scotland, particularly on health and education, is unfair to England and unjustified? Does he accept that, if there were a Scottish Parliament, many Conservative Members like me who feel strongly about public expenditure would campaign vigorously to bring the level of expenditure per head in Scotland down to the level in England? That would benefit English taxpayers.

Mr. Waldegrave: I will not go as far as my hon. Friend, because those matters are negotiated each year in relation to Wales and Northern Ireland as well as to Scotland. What I am saying, and what my hon. Friend has represented in his question, is that, if the Labour party's ill-thought-out, half-baked plans were to come about, there would be a huge reaction from England. That would be bound to damage the situation as my hon. Friend has described—it is only one of the matters in which the Union would be damaged, but it is one of the most important.

Value Added Tax

6. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the total revenue raised from value added tax in (a) 1978–79 and (b) 1995–96. [14176]

Mr. Jack: In constant 1995-96 prices, the receipts were £14.1 billion and £43.1 billion respectively.

Mr. Williams: Can the Minister say what the Chancellor meant when he said in the Budget statement on 30 November 1993 that one of his options

"must be to extend the VAT base. The main candidates are food, children's clothes, transport, sewerage and newspapers"?

Is it not clear that, if we had another Conservative Government, just as the last one put VAT on heating, the next one would put VAT on food?

Mr. Jack: I am intrigued that the hon. Gentleman has chosen to ask me that question, when he could have asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor a little earlier. I also notice that he was reading in order to get accuracy. If he had read my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget speech in 1993, he would have seen that it is perfectly true that, in that context, my right hon. and learned Friend rather teased the House of Commons when he talked about his views on how we should have a broader tax base. He reviewed a number of possibilities and then went on to describe his own solution to broaden the tax base at that time. He introduced the House to the

concept of the insurance premium tax and the air passenger duty. At the end of his speech, he said to the House of Commons:

"I can now confirm that I have no need this year to propose any changes to the VAT base."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 940.]

The hon. Gentleman asked the question. He read his question for accuracy and I read the reply for accuracy.

Mr. Stephen: Does my right hon. Friend recall that, when we increased VAT to 17.5 per cent., the amount of that extra tax was refunded by way of subsidy to council tax payers? Does he also recall that, when we put tax on domestic gas and electricity, we fully compensated pensioners and people on low earnings by increasing their pensions and social security? Is he aware of any plans to compensate pensioners and people on low earnings for the consequences of a windfall tax?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is entirely right to remind the House of the steps that we took to protect the interests of pensioners when we had to take difficult economic decisions as we were recovering from a very deep recession. We have now got the economy on track—we have the fastest-growing major western economy—and it is doing extremely well. That would be damaged by the arrival of the tax to which my hon. Friend refers and, as far as I am aware, we have heard nothing from the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to tell us anything about the windfall tax, never mind about compensating pensioners.

Ms Primarolo: Does the Financial Secretary remember the Prime Minister's promise at the last election not to extend the scope of VAT? Does he also remember that, in his Government's pre-election Budget, the then Chancellor promised not to put VAT on fuel? Can he explain to the House why his Government broke those promises and why the electorate should trust them at all on any tax issue, particularly VAT?

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend dealt very adequately with the question of VAT and the last election in his own very clear answer. However, I shall tell the hon. Lady because, when it comes to the economy, people should judge a Government not only on an individual item, but on whether they actually deliver. We have never hidden from the fact that putting VAT on fuel and power was a very difficult decision but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) reminded the House moments ago, we did help those who were most harshly hit, either through social security benefits or through direct help to pensioners. We have now delivered an economy that is the fastest-growing in western Europe, rapidly falling unemployment, the best inflation record for 50 years and the lowest mortgage rates for nearly 30 years. That is why people will believe us and not the Opposition.

Household Incomes (Tax)

7. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the average percentage of household income directed to tax payments in (a) the United Kingdom and (b) other EU member states, in the most recent year for which figures are available. [14178]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Angela Knight): A family on average earnings in the United Kingdom are expected to pay just over 35 per cent. of their earnings in tax next year. Although comparative figures are not available for other European Union countries, the overall burden of taxation on the economy in the United Kingdom, at 35¾ per cent. of gross domestic product last year, is one of the lowest levels in Europe and is below that of France, Germany and Italy.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend accept, first, that those excellent figures would have been even better, had we not spent so much on the disaster of the exchange rate mechanism; and, secondly, that we will never accept a Europe-wide tax system—unlike Labour Members, who are up to their eyes in the ERM the whole time, would take us back into it and would completely undermine the British economy?

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend is right to make those points about the strength of the British economy. I can assure him that the tax point to which he refers would be a matter of unanimity and that this country—this Government—will vote against that.

European Monetary Union

8. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the German and French Finance Ministers to discuss the timetable for entry into European monetary union. [14179]

Mr. Oppenheim: Preparations for economic and monetary union are regularly discussed at meetings of the Economic and Finance Council. The last such meeting, which I attended on the Chancellor's behalf, was on 27 January.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Minister aware that the Chancellor's weakness and vacillation are causing a great deal of concern in Europe about our commitment to Europe? Is he also aware that the leaders of major British businesses are concerned about their future, trading in a Europe with a common currency to which they do not belong? Is it not time that the Government and the Chancellor started running themselves, rather than allowing themselves to be run by right-wing Back Benchers who hate Europe and the ideal of Europe, despite the prosperity that it has brought us over 50 years?

Mr. Oppenheim: When it comes to vacillation, I seem to remember that new Labour has changed its policy on tax, on spending and on grammar schools. As soon as we changed our policy on Europe, it poodled along behind us. In fact, new Labour's unique selling proposition seems to be, "Those guys have made such a mess of things that we are going to copy all their policies."

Mr. Duncan Smith: When my hon. Friend next speaks to his counterparts in Europe, will he explain to them that the shadow Foreign Secretary's recent comments mean that if they do something, the Labour party will automatically follow them into the single currency on economic grounds? Will he explain to his counterparts that Conservatives approach the subject not

only as an economic issue but, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, as an issue with constitutional implications?

Mr. Oppenheim: Yes, my hon. Friend is broadly right. Any commitment to economic and monetary union would be the largest change in our economic affairs for many decades, but would not necessarily lead to political union. My hon. Friend can draw whatever conclusions he wants from that answer.

VAT (Domestic Fuel)

9. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reduce VAT on domestic fuel. [14180]

Mr. Waldegrave: No. VAT was applied to domestic fuel for sound environmental and necessary revenue reasons, which continue to apply.

Mr. Winnick: Why not? Does not the Chief Secretary know that VAT on domestic fuel causes particular hardship to many pensioners and others on low income and should be reduced? But then a Chancellor who does not even know the price of a tin of baked beans would not worry about such matters, would he?

Mr. Waldegrave: It takes a certain nerve for a party—the Labour party—that is making its centrepiece today a new tax on gas and electricity to complain about VAT on fuel. It is perfectly clear that the new tax on gas and electricity proposed by the Labour party will not only hit pension funds and shares, but is bound to affect prices. The hon. Gentleman has a brass neck to complain about VAT.

Mr. Yeo: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that old people were given full protection against the extra costs arising from the introduction of VAT on fuel? If the VAT rate were reduced, the benefits would go to the largest consumers of fuel, who tend to be the richest people. The proposal so enthusiastically espoused by the Labour party is a way to rob poor people and help rich people, while wrecking the environment in the process.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is quite right: pensioners, those on income support and others were fully compensated. My hon. Friend is also right that the bigger one's house, the more fuel tax one pays.

Mr. Milburn: Does the Chief Secretary agree with the statement made by the Chancellor in September 1993 that VAT on fuel is a perfectly fair tax?

Mr. Waldegrave: As the hon. Gentleman is a member of a Front-Bench team that proposes a new tax on gas and electricity, he should ask whether his so-called windfall tax is fair.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Has my right hon. Friend had time to read the literature put out by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats at the last general election, proposing carbon taxes to put up the price of fuel because it was too cheap? Has he seen what consumers are paying today for gas and electricity? Even with VAT, the cost of fuel has been reduced, owing to the Government's policies.

Mr. Waldegrave: The privatisations of the great fuel utilities, against which the Labour party voted on every occasion, have brought about a 2 per cent. real-terms decrease, after VAT, in the price of electricity and a 20 per cent. real-terms decrease, after VAT and everything else, in the price of gas. The Labour party opposed that, root and branch.

European Monetary Union

10. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the prospects for Britain being one of the initial participants in European monetary union. [14181]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am confident that the United Kingdom will be able to achieve and sustain the convergence criteria of low inflation, low fiscal deficit and low public debt, and they will contribute to our policy of creating jobs and raising living standards in this country. At the moment, I believe that it is unlikely, although not impossible, that enough countries will be sufficiently convergent by 1 January 1999 for EMU to go ahead on that date. If EMU were to go ahead at any date without sufficient convergence, we would not be part of it.

Mr. Ainger: Does the Chancellor agree with the Foreign Secretary's view that joining EMU would mean a loss of sovereignty, or does he agree with the head of Toyota and the chairman of Unilever that failure to join EMU would mean a loss of jobs? Which is it? Which is his position, and who speaks for the Government on EMU?

Mr. Clarke: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, the answer that I just gave is an impeccable statement of the policy that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I last gave together outside Downing street, and the policy is perfectly clear. All international engagements involve some pooling of sovereignty, and the political implications of any international engagement are a matter that the House and the public always want to discuss whenever such an event occurs.

As for the opinions of leading business men, they were not commenting on sovereignty; they were commenting, as they are entitled to do, on what they thought would be the implications for their businesses. I believe that both the gentlemen quoted are perfectly content with the Government's policy that we keep those options open, that we contribute to the evolution of policy and that we keep our eye on the ball, which is British jobs, British prosperity and the future well-being of this country.

Mr. Sweeney: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the Allensbach Opinion Research Institute's most recent survey in Germany revealed that only 5 per cent. of Germans are wholly in favour of the euro, about 15 per cent. are mildly in favour and 80 per cent. are against? Does he agree that the most important convergence criterion that needs to be satisfied is the deficit in public support?

Mr. Clarke: I am not familiar with the Allensbach survey and I shall take the opportunity of catching up with

the figures. I doubt that people responding in Germany were concentrating on the key issues of British jobs, British prosperity and the well-being of UK Ltd. I hope that in this country we shall pay attention to British jobs and British prosperity to the same extent as German citizens pay attention, no doubt, to German jobs and German prosperity, when and if ever we have to take decisions on such matters.

Mr. Shore: The prospect of Britain joining the single currency on 1 January 1999 appears to be receding, and I think that we are all grateful for that. I know that the Chancellor is fastidious about the integrity of the convergence criteria. Will he make it plain that he will not accept the type of fudge that the French have gone in for by transferring telecom pensions against their 3 per cent. deficit, and will he also say that, if the Germans do hit the 3½ per cent. of GDP in their borrowing requirement this year, as it now appears that they will, he will exert himself to put a stop to other European countries joining a fudge currency on 1 January 1999?

Mr. Clarke: There is no point in commenting on whether the chances are advancing or receding on any of those things. We are pursuing a cautious and pragmatic approach based on our best judgment of British interests, ensuring that British influence is brought to bear on the evolution of policy, which is of great importance whatever happens to the future of the European market on which we so depend.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that accounting devices of the type that he describes and others should play no part whatever in such decisions. What matters is the underlying structural fiscal deficit that has been achieved by a specific country. What matters even more is whether a low structural deficit is likely to be sustained for the foreseeable future by that country, if it were to go into economic and monetary union. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I shall continue to argue that point as strongly in the councils of Europe, in respect of all member states, as I have in the past.

National Income (Business Taxation)

11. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the proportion of national income taken in business taxation in (a) the United Kingdom, (b) in Germany, (c) in France, (d) in Italy and (e) as an average among European Union member states. [14182]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development estimates for 1994 show that the average EU tax burden on business is 10.6 per cent. of GDP. The tax burden for business in Germany is 9.4 per cent.; in Italy, 12.8 per cent.; in France, 16.8 per cent.; and in the United Kingdom, 8 per cent., one of the very lowest rates in Europe.

Sir John Hannam: I thank my hon. Friend for that illuminating reply. Does not it show that Conservative low-tax policies have helped to produce the most successful economy in Europe? Would not all that be ruined if the Labour party ever came to power, with a windfall tax, a minimum wage and the social chapter?

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend is correct. Our tax system has created jobs, whereas many of our European partners have been unable to do so. It was interesting to learn this week of two companies that propose to leave France and come to Britain, simply because our tax burden is lower and the cost of employment in France, in particular, is so much higher.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February. [14159]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Wilkinson: Has my right hon. Friend had time today to study the reported comments of European Union Competition Commissioner Karel van Miert on the respective levels of state subsidy within the European Union? Did my right hon. Friend note that the United Kingdom has the lowest level of state subsidy per worker within the European Union and that the Federal Republic of Germany has the highest annual disbursement per year of any EU country? Is it not noteworthy that the UK now has the lowest unemployment for six years and that it is falling, whereas the federal republic has the highest unemployment for 64 years and it is rising? What deductions does my right hon. Friend make from those figures?

The Prime Minister: I have not yet seen the detail of what Commissioner van Miert said, but the conclusion, from what my hon. Friend says, is surely obvious. The fact is that state subsidies cannot hide the effect of high social costs. They add to the levels of taxation and, in so doing, they damage competitiveness and employment prospects. That is precisely what we have seen across continental Europe. It is a problem that we have avoided in the UK, which is why our unemployment is so much lower.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister confirm the following: first, that since last June when he promised that the beef ban would be lifted by last November, no part of the beef ban has been lifted; secondly, that under the selective slaughter scheme, not a single animal has yet been slaughtered; thirdly, that no formal proposal has yet even been put to the European Commission about lifting the ban from the BSE-free certified herds in Scotland, Northern Ireland and elsewhere; and, fourthly, that the cost of the BSE fiasco is now estimated at £3.3 billion and is currently running at £4 million a day?

The Prime Minister: If I may take the last point first, which deals with cost, I think that the right hon. Gentleman should be more careful about what he says about that. If he recalls, it was the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) who first tried to stoke up the health scare about British beef right across Europe, despite the fact that British beef is safer than continental

beef, and it was the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) who supported the unjustified beef ban. I find the right hon. Gentleman's behaviour throughout the entire crisis absolutely astonishing. His behaviour would discredit a student debating society. Not once has he put the interests of the British beef industry in front of making petty party political points for his own party interests.

Mr. Blair: Four specific questions, not one specific answer—that is about par for the course. I remind the Prime Minister that he was not obliged to stand at the Dispatch Box last June and promise that he would lift the beef ban by last November, but he made the promise. He broke the promise—like so many of his promises. He made the promise, not because he thought he could deliver on it, but because, as usual, he was in a tight spot and wanted to get out of it. Let me just put one of those specific questions and allow him to answer it: is the Minister of Agriculture right when he says that the cost is now £3.3 billion, or, as he put it, the equivalent of 2p on the standard rate of income tax? Is he right, or is he wrong?

The Prime Minister: The cost is of that order. That is correct, and a substantial part of the reason for that is the health scares created by Opposition Members. Throughout the whole affair, the Government have been entirely open with the British nation, and the Labour party has repeatedly tried to stoke up health fears at home and abroad. If the Labour leader was really interested in restoring the British beef industry, he would be working with us to promote it, not undermining our position in the European Union just as we present plans on certified herds to the European Commission. But he is not interested in getting the ban lifted at all; he is interested in his own petty points.

Mr. Blair: Rightly has it been said that BSE also stands for "blame somebody else". The Prime Minister would do a lot more credit to his office if, just for once, when his Government make a mistake, he would accept responsibility for it. That he will not do so is one part of the reason why that fiasco will stand as a symbol of the incompetence of the most incompetent Government in living memory.

The Prime Minister: Even at this stage, the right hon. Gentleman takes the position of those who would do down the British beef industry. Before he does more damage to the British beef industry, he should reflect upon the damage that he has already done to it. It is British farmers and taxpayers who have helped pay the price for his posturing over the past few months. The bitter harvest has been reaped, partly because of the Labour party's domestic self-interest.

Mr. Elletson: Has my right hon. Friend seen recent reports in the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* and *The Express* about a little girl of 11 in my constituency who has been addicted to heroin since the age of nine? Will he order an urgent inquiry into how Lancashire social services failed to notice that that little girl was in danger, despite the fact that eight members of her immediate family, including her granny, have been convicted of offences relating to the supply of heroin? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the case is an horrific example of the growing threat to children from drugs, and will he reassure my constituents and the country that the Government continue to make the war against drugs a top priority?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly offer that assurance to my hon. Friend and the House. My hon. Friend highlights a truly tragic case, as he set it out. Although I am not familiar with all the details of the case, I was aware of it, and I understand that the director of social services in Lancashire is now reviewing the department's action, and that a report will be sent to the Department of Health's social services inspectorate, where we will examine it with great speed and great care. It is essential that, when a child needs protection, it receives protection from all the agencies concerned. On the evidence at present available—I emphasise that—it seems as though that may not have happened in that case.

On the more general question of drugs, as my hon. Friend is aware, the Government are deeply concerned about the problem of drugs and young people in particular. That is why the Home Office is currently supporting more than 1,500 locally based schemes on drug protection.

Mr. Ashdown: Surely the real issue is no longer the price that farmers have paid for one incompetent Minister, but the price that the country is paying for the whole squabbling herd of them. We are seeing rising inflation, the usual pre-arranged pre-election boost followed by the familiar post-election bust, sacked teachers, the health service plunged into crisis daily, and increasing class sizes. When will the Prime Minister realise that he has only one function left to perform that is of any interest to anyone: naming the day? When will he get on with it?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman would be well advised to examine more carefully the litany that he recites. We have set an inflation target, which we shall meet, and which the right hon. Gentleman could only dream about. The average level of inflation under the last Lib-Lab Government was more than 15 per cent.—no wonder the shadow Chancellor dare not set an inflation target and tell the country what it is. He promises taxes, but he does not say who will pay them. He cannot tell us whether he would set an inflation target or what it would be. The right hon. Gentleman obviously has not seen today's annual economic report from the European Commission, which argues that we will meet our inflation target.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Has my right hon. Friend carried out studies to establish how much a reduction in value added tax on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. would be outweighed by the impact on prices of a windfall tax on energy suppliers, which would possibly leave consumers worse off?

The Prime Minister: I would be very happy to carry out such an inquiry, if we were told who would bear the windfall tax and at what rate it would be levied. We are now told that the windfall tax is legal, but, despite the fact that Labour Front Benchers claim to be in favour of freedom of information, they will not release the information on which that assertion is based. I invite them to do so. I also invite the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to tell us who would pay

the windfall tax and at what rate it would be levied. He could then tell the consumers of electricity, gas and oil precisely what that would do to their bills.

Q2. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February. [14160]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: Will the Prime Minister comment on the statement by the Employment Minister, the right hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), who admitted that only about half of the figures showing a fall in unemployment are genuine? Which half of those figures should we believe? As, at long last, a Minister has told us half the truth, will the Prime Minister inform us when just one Minister will tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend said no such thing, as the hon. Gentleman knows. Opposition Members cannot bear the fact that unemployment is falling rapidly in this country, and has been falling for three years. There are now more people in work in each and every region.

Mr. Janner: Four million unemployed.

The Prime Minister: The hon. and learned Gentleman has not a single shred of evidence to support his claim. That is fiddling the figures on a scale that not even the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) would contemplate. Unemployment is falling and people are in work. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) should recognise that fact. There has been a dramatic fall in unemployment in his constituency. He should talk to his constituents who are now in work and who would lose their jobs under the policies that Opposition Front Benchers advocate.

Q4 **Mr. Day:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February. [14162]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Day: Bearing it in mind that the new consensus in British politics seems to be based on the successful policies of 18 years of Conservative government, and given the fact that the Opposition have spent the past two years denying the previous 16 years and are now espousing all the policies that they voted against in the past, will my right hon. Friend inform the House and the country why the electorate should consider voting for the pale pink imitation opposite, when it has the real thing in the person of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. After 18 years of Conservative government, we have low taxes, low inflation, more jobs and tumbling unemployment. The Labour party may adopt our rhetoric, but Labour Members do not believe what they say, and neither should anybody else.

Q5. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February. [14163]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Prime Minister aware that, once he has had the guts to go to the country, for the first time in his political life he will be sitting on the Opposition Benches? I have been keeping this seat warm for him. After the election, at least half a dozen Tory ex-Ministers will put the knife into him, because they want his job. Then he will have the galling experience of having to vote for one of those Tory bastards. Which one will it be?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman comprehensively removes the thought that one mellows as one grows older. A report earlier this week said that people do not get cantankerous as they grow older; they are born that way. Remarks like the one that the hon. Gentleman has just made were repeatedly put to me before the last general election. He is still sitting there; I am still sitting here. I look forward to congratulating him on his 70th birthday, and he will still be there if he holds his seat.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day [5th Allotted Day].

There will be a debate entitled "The BSE Crisis" on an Opposition motion.

TUESDAY 18 FEBRUARY—Consideration of supplemental allocation of time motion relating to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

Remaining stages of the National Heritage Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 19 FEBRUARY—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motions on the Social Security Benefits Up-Rating Order, the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-Rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order, the Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations, the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order and the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Amendment Regulations.

THURSDAY 20 FEBRUARY—Debate on the constitution on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 21 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting.

Madam Speaker, the House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 19 February there will be a debate on future noise policy in European Standing Committee A. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

I regret that, once again, I am unable to give comprehensive information about the following week, but on Monday 24 February I expect to take Government business, including Second Reading of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill *[Lords]*. The House may like to know that on Thursday 27 February I intend that we should have the annual debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment.

[*Wednesday 19 February:*

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community Document: 11419/96, Future Noise Policy. Relevant European Legislation Committee report: HC 36-xi (1996-97).]

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information. He announced that on Thursday there would be a debate on the constitution. He will know from previous exchanges at business questions that we welcome such a debate, but can he tell us who will speak for the Government? Who will explain the many and varied statements of Government policy on devolution that have been made in recent days? Will the Secretary of State for Health participate in the debate, or is it true that he has been sacked from his role as co-ordinator of policy in this area?

May we have a debate on the inspection rights of the National Audit Office, in the light of the Government's refusal to allow the NAO access to the books of private companies that contract to provide Government services? The expansion of Government services provided by the private sector has been so extensive and so rapid that often there is no real check on the expenditure of huge amounts of public money. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, whether expenditure is in the private or the public sector, taxpayers' money should be properly accounted for, and the House should be able to ensure that that is the case? A debate might help in that regard.

Finally, will the Leader of the House find time before the general election for a debate on the collection and presentation of official statistics? There is widespread public scepticism about Government figures—scepticism that was reinforced yesterday by the admission by a senior Minister at the Department for Education and Employment that unemployment was a temporary phase because the Government had given the unemployment figures a boost in the short term, confirming what many people already knew.

It is no wonder that the public have no confidence in the Government's statistics. As Ministers claim to be anxious to debate various aspects of Labour party policy, may we make a bid for a debate, in Government time, on the need for an independent statistical service?

Mr. Newton: I shall take those questions in order. I anticipate that the Ministers speaking in the debate on the constitution will be the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, for obvious reasons. I shall consider what the hon. Lady said in her second question, but I assure her that the Government are always anxious for the National Audit Office to have the information that it needs in order to do its work—although other factors must be taken into account when that is being judged. As for the hon. Lady's question about official statistics, I echo what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said a few moments ago. There is a good deal more doubt about some of the exaggerated estimates of unemployment that we hear from Opposition Members than about any of the figures given by the Government when the signs of falling unemployment are so obvious.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): My right hon. Friend has been very cautious in the last couple of weeks in responding to questions about the tax simplification procedure report from the Procedure Committee. Can he be more forthcoming this week? It is an extremely important matter, and I think that we ought to be getting on with it.

Mr. Newton: I acknowledge the importance of the matter, but I cannot go beyond the cautious sympathy, or sympathetic caution, in which I have engaged for the past two weeks.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I do not think it entirely obvious that only the Secretaries of State for Scotland or for Wales should speak in a debate on the constitution. There are constitutional matters for the United Kingdom. One of the oddities of the present Government, however, is that no one appears to be in charge of constitutional matters—no one, that is, except the Prime Minister.

May I, too, request a debate on statistics? I think that that would be valuable. More urgently, before the end of the Session, may we have a debate on an Adjournment motion about the future of Northern Ireland, which is still clearly a matter of huge concern and still not resolved? May we also have a debate on the housing projection of 4.4 million houses to be built over the next 25 years?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has asked for no fewer than three debates in one or two sentences. I certainly cannot promise all those, but, obviously, as always, I will consider his representations.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): While thanking my right hon. Friend for responding to the request that we have made for a debate on the constitution, may I ask him to think of the details again because what has been asked for is a debate on a substantive motion upholding the integrity of the United Kingdom? Perhaps a debate that the Prime Minister led on that wider issue would flush out some of the Opposition.

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's concluding remarks. It certainly would be very desirable to, as he put it, flush the Opposition out in respect of their proposals on the constitution and I harbour hopes that the debate that I have announced will enable us to do that.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): In view of the immensely increasing dangers to peace in the Balkans, both between Turkey and Greece, in Albania, in Kosovo and in Cyprus because of the aggressive policies of the Greek-Cypriot Government, is it not time that the House of Commons had a real opportunity to debate these issues in depth—perhaps a two-day debate—before we go into the final seizures of this Government?

Mr. Newton: Without in any way dismissing the importance of the matters to which the hon. Gentleman adverts and in which he has long taken a close interest, I do not think that I can hold out hope for a two-day foreign affairs debate in the near future.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): In view of the horrible killing yesterday of Stephen Restorick in Northern Ireland, which will achieve absolutely nothing for any purpose, but simply add to hatred and bitterness in Northern Ireland, might there be a case, unusually, perhaps next week, to have a short debate in which all the parties could express their respect and admiration for our armed forces, which are doing such a terribly difficult job in seeking to preserve security, and also their concern and respect for their parents, relatives, friends and all people associated with them?

Mr. Newton: While I cannot, to my regret, make an immediate undertaking to provide time for such a debate, I would like to associate myself with the thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks concerning our forces and the people of Northern Ireland.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I join the Leader of the House and the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) in that comment and sympathise with those relatives who are mourning today in this nation. At the same time, I join the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) in reminding the Leader of the House that Northern Ireland is part of this nation and therefore would like to be involved in the constitutional debate as well. Perhaps on that occasion it may be possible to know—as the Leader of the House is aware of my pressure for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee to have the same rights as the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees—whether the period of consultations is ending and when the changes will be brought forward to effect the proposal.

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving me notice of this question. We are certainly seeking to complete the consultations as soon as possible and I hope that it will be possible to make progress.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend make time available at an early opportunity for a debate on the economy, not least on the question of employment, so that I can point out the huge successes in my constituency as a consequence of the Government's economic policies? Is he aware that unemployment is now down to an all-time low of 1,320, which is a 50 per cent. reduction over the period of this Government, since 1992? Will he urgently look for time for a debate that could bring out those points?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly look for time for a debate that will help to bring out those points, although, I am glad to note, they are being emphasised in various ways: at Prime Minister's questions, on other occasions and through the remarks of my hon. and learned Friend. It certainly is a very good story that deserves to be fully set out.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): In the debate on the constitution, we will presumably be able to discuss the most fundamental constitutional provision in the UK: the right to vote. In preparation, therefore, for the debate next Thursday, may we have information of just a basic nature on how many people are on the new electoral registers that will operate from this weekend? The Treasury and the Office for National Statistics have refused to provide that information, claiming that it will come forward only in April. April might be too late. We might be into an election by then. How many people have the vote out of those who are entitled to vote? That basic information should be available to us.

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly look into the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on local government finance, because the good people of Ealing face a 10 per cent. increase in their council tax and a severe reduction in services from the ghastly Ealing Labour council? *[Interruption.]* Labour Members may laugh, but it is a serious matter. The people of Ealing will have to pay for the inefficiency of the Ealing Labour council, and I ask for a debate next week.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will recall that we had a full day's debate on local government finance and the revenue support grant only a week ago, so I cannot promise an early opportunity. However, I wish my hon.

[Mr. Newton]

Friend well in defending his constituency interests, as he always does, and perhaps he might raise the subject in a Wednesday morning debate.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): With due respect to the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, the Leader of the House must recognise that a debate on the constitution should embrace Northern Ireland and England. That being so, will he ask the Prime Minister to consider whether he or the Deputy Prime Minister should take part in the debate next week?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my right hon. Friends will consider the right hon. Gentleman's remarks with care, but there are only two slots in a debate and it is reasonable for the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales to take part next week.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the disgraceful circumstances that surround the design of the euro notes? Is he aware that the euro notes that bear pictures of bridges, especially a bridge in India, have been copied from an English book, probably in breach of copyright? Is it not disgraceful that that has occurred and that Europe has covered up the problem? Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a Government statement to give an undertaking to the British people that those particular notes will never be introduced as legal tender?

Mr. Newton: I was not present throughout Treasury questions, but my hon. Friend may have asked a question that he was not able to ask earlier because he did not catch your eye, Madam Speaker, although I do not suggest that your selection was not right and proper. I will bring my hon. Friend's remarks to the Chancellor's attention but, as my briefing states, the matter is not one for the Treasury or, indeed, the Government. The design of the euro notes and coins is the responsibility of the European Monetary Institute.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Why has the Secretary of State for Health been signed off for the debate on the constitution next week? Is it because, as we read in the papers, he has been sacked for blurting out the truth—there is no greater crime for a Tory Minister—or should we believe the story from 10 Downing street that it was a figment of our imaginations that he was appointed in the first place? Has he been sacked or is he a figment?

Mr. Newton: Whatever else, we may agree that the hon. Gentleman has a vivid imagination. We may also agree that if his question suggested that the Secretary of State for Scotland should not take part in the debate, that is interesting coming from that quarter.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate on the appalling state of affairs in Deal in my constituency, where the Labour county council has threatened to close the library, has threatened fire service cover and has caused job losses without opportunities for job replacement, because the county councillor responsible for job replacement has been on 14 junketing trips abroad in the past three years?

Mr. Newton: Since we had a debate on local government in Kent only just over a week ago, my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot give him an encouraging reply. I hope that my hon. Friend will find other ways to make his effective points.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Is the Leader of the House aware that on 24 February there will be a lobby of the House by the victims of the Child Support Agency? In view of the chaos in the administration of that dreadful agency, may we please have a debate as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Newton: Such matters have been discussed at length by the House on several occasions, so I cannot promise an early debate. What I can say, as the hon. Lady knows, is that much effort has gone into improving the work of the Child Support Agency, and undoubtedly a significant improvement has taken place.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): May we have a debate next week on the subject raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw)—that of Labour politicians such as councillors junketing around the world? We could then highlight the excesses outlined by the district auditor in Doncaster, where councillors were sent on free trips all round the world, and had so many business lunches and were said to have consumed so much alcohol that they could not stand up, let alone work. We would also be able to contrast the behaviour of the Doncaster councillors with that of the Leader of the Opposition, who travelled to the United States by Concorde on a free trip.

Mr. Newton: I have noted the various reports that have appeared in the press about such matters, and I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern. I hope that that concern will be noted by those on the Opposition Front Bench, as it appears to be a matter at least as much for them as for me.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Did the right hon. Gentleman hear the Prime Minister saying today that there was not a shred of evidence that the unemployment figures were fiddled? Will he refer to early-day motion 525, which has been signed by more than 50 Opposition Members?

[*That this House draws attention to the Government's fraudulent unemployment figures which ignore the latest Labour force Survey which shows unemployment about 302,000 higher than the Government's claimant count and further ignores the findings of the Employment Policy Institute that the number of jobless people who say that they want a job is well over four million, and not the 1.8 million registered by the Government's deliberately flawed claimant count; and calls on the Government to come clean on the true level of unemployment and the job insecurity and human suffering that unemployment causes in pre-election Britain.*]

In the light of that information, should we not have a debate as a matter of urgency, so as to point out the disgraceful fact that there are more than a dozen exclusions from the claimant count? We could also make clear the need for an honest answer on the unemployment figures before the election, and an end to the lies that are presaging that election.

Mr. Newton: I have already observed to one of my hon. Friends that I see the attraction of a debate on

unemployment and other economic matters, because what will emerge from such a debate is not the sort of accusation that the hon. and learned Gentleman is chucking about, but the fact that Britain's success in having more people working and fewer out of work than any other major European country is one of the notable successes of the Conservative Government.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend find time before this Parliament ends for a debate on the third report of the Select Committee on Social Security, which is about the uprating of state retirement pensions payable to people resident abroad? Is he aware that that is the theme of early-day motion 185, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill)?

[*That this House expresses its grave concern at the discrimination practised by Her Majesty's Government against British state pensioners living in certain countries abroad; believes that the denial of pension increases to persons who have paid national insurance contributions is indefensible; and calls on the Government to end without further delay this discrimination against the hero generation who saved the world from Hitler.*]

That early-day motion has attracted the signatures of no fewer than 248 hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Select Committee calls for a free vote in prime time on the matter, because there is clear discrimination against British citizens who have worked hard and paid a full stamp all their working lives, and who have gone abroad in their retirement, perhaps to join their children or grandchildren, only to see their living standards decline.

It would cost only £255 million a year to put right that manifest injustice. How can we ignore it, when £3 billion a year is wasted on social security fraud and £9 billion a year is made in contributions to the European Union, much of which is fraudulently misapplied?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware of the Government's increasingly successful efforts to counter the undoubted problem of social security benefit fraud. As for the main purpose of his question, I am aware that that controversy has continued for some time; it was going on when I was Secretary of State for Social Security. My hon. Friend talks about "only" £255 million a year, but he ought to acknowledge, as I hope that he will, that the Government need to think carefully about priorities, in view of the need to control the growth in social security spending as a whole.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): The Leader of the House will recall that I asked him last week when the Secretary of State was to release the official figures for hospital waiting lists in England. May I remind him that we expected the figures to be released on 3 February, but, 10 days later, there is no sign of them? Does the Secretary of State propose to come to the House to make a statement on the figures? Since it became clear that the figures for the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen hospital were being doctored, I have received correspondence from one Liverpool resident who has had his knee operation cancelled three times and who now knows that he will not figure on any official waiting list. Does he accept that while the Prime Minister may make light of fiddling, no one else—certainly no Opposition Member—would agree with such abuses of official figures?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I might simply make the point that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is due to answer questions here next Tuesday.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): My right hon. Friend will be aware that many of us are delighted that we are to have a debate on the constitution on Thursday. Will he seriously consider tabling a substantive motion for the debate? The Prime Minister should speak in that debate, as we believe that it is important that the Leader of the Opposition should come to the Dispatch Box to explain to the House why his proposals to have Scots running Westminster, as well as Scots running Scotland, are fair to the 83 per cent. of the population living in England who will be faced with changes voted for by Scottish Members of Parliament who cannot vote on the same changes for Scotland. It is crazy, and it will break up the United Kingdom unless we stop it now.

Mr. Newton: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend that it is about time that we had clarification from the Leader of the Opposition of his proposals and their implications.

Mr. Bill Olner (Nuneaton): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for an urgent debate on the continuing deterioration of the west coast main line, which runs through my constituency? I do not know whether the Leader of the House is aware of this, but Lord Archer was travelling to the Wirral today to make a keynote speech prior to the by-election. His train left Euston 40 minutes late and went slower and slower until Lord Archer had to abandon his trip at Nuneaton. Will the Government make sure that passengers on the west coast main line get to where they have to go on time?

Mr. Newton: I am naturally sorry to hear of my noble Friend Lord Archer's unhappy experience, although clearly there is rather less sympathy among Opposition Members. In view of the experience recounted by the hon. Gentleman, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will look carefully at the matter.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): May we have an urgent debate on the implications of the social chapter for employment in my constituency—where unemployment is falling—so that we may talk about Germany, where the social chapter is applied and where unemployment increased by more than 500,000 in the month of December alone? It is important that people know the precise implications of the social chapter and the minimum wage.

Mr. Newton: That request, as my hon. Friend will realise, ties in with a number of others that I have received during these exchanges. I will bear his representations very much in mind, along with the others.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Leader of the House will be aware that I have raised the subject of the treatment of asylum seekers before. Will he find time for a statement or a debate about the number of asylum

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

seekers still held in British prisons, the number in Rochester prison who are still on hunger strike and the great difficulty that supporters and friends of those people are having in making bail applications to the courts to ensure that they at least have some degree of liberty? Is it not a disgrace that this country routinely imprisons nearly 1,000 people for doing nothing more than seek asylum, having fled from political oppression?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows that undoubtedly there have been abuses of asylum as a means of obtaining entry to this country, and that there is general agreement that it was necessary to take action on that front.

On the hon. Gentleman's actual question, I cannot promise a statement of the kind that he sought, but I can draw his attention to the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is due to answer questions this day week.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May we have an urgent debate on local government in London? I refer my right hon. Friend to an answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford). It pointed out that outstanding rent and tax arrears amounted to £135 million in the London borough of Lambeth and £143 million in Camden; that in Hackney rent arrears were more than 30 per cent. of the annual rent roll, and 9.8 per cent. of council properties were empty; and that in Haringey rent arrears were 33 per cent. of the annual rent roll, and in Southwark more than 20 per cent.

Is my right hon. Friend further aware that in the London boroughs of Haringey and Islington arrears of council tax are such that the councils prefer not to tell the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy what they are? Is not it an urgent situation, when the authorities claim that they do not have enough money and want more from the Government but refuse to collect what is due to them from their tenants and council tax payers?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will recall that I have already made the point once today that it is not long since we had a debate on local government, which certainly would have embraced London, so I cannot promise another immediately. I regret that he evidently did not on that occasion have the opportunity to make the admirably succinct and effective speech that he has just made.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Home Secretary is the police authority for London and that it has been customary to have an annual debate on policing in London. Does he recall the Prime Minister's pledge to provide resources to put an extra 5,000 bobbies on the beat, and is he aware that Londoners have lost 600 police constables and that the Home Secretary, in his capacity as police authority, has said that London has had its share of the additional resources but that he does not know where they have gone?

I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 527.

[That this House is concerned that Londoners face a 14.4 per cent. increase in the share of council tax which goes to meet policing costs in the capital; is horrified that the Home Secretary has described this as 'a modest increase', particularly at a time when the overall number of police officers has fallen by 649, of whom 599 were police constables; recalls that the Prime Minister made a pledge to provide resources to increase police numbers nationally by 5000; demands to know where London's share of those extra resources has been spent; is concerned at the transfer of the burden of the cost of policing from central government to council taxpayers; wishes to know why Londoners are being asked to pay more for fewer police officers whilst experiencing the worst crime clear-up rate in the country; and calls upon the Home Secretary, in his capacity as the Police Authority for London, to arrange for a debate on policing in London at the earliest opportunity before the Dissolution.]

In view of the remarks made earlier by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that London council tax payers will be paying 14.5 per cent. more for policing this year, for a lesser service. Will he therefore ensure that we have the annual police debate on London before Parliament is dissolved?

Mr. Newton: On the question of a debate, I shall ensure that that is added to what I sometimes call my list.

On the rest of what the hon. Gentleman said, I should perhaps make the point that council tax payers in London contribute only about 8 per cent. towards the cost of policing London, compared with an average contribution of about 12 per cent. elsewhere, and that in 1997-98 the spending power of the Metropolitan police will be £55 million more than in 1996-97.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. Friend has announced a debate on the constitution for next Thursday, and he will know that last week and on other occasions I have pressed him for just such a debate. My concern is that he announced today that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would not lead the debate. He also said that he would accept and welcome the idea that the Leader of the Opposition should come and make clear his position. I put it to him that unless the Prime Minister speaks on behalf of the whole country—not only Scotland and Wales and my constituency in England—at the Dispatch Box, we will not have the opportunity to hear from the Leader of the Opposition exactly what the Labour party's policy is towards English electors as well as those of Scotland and Wales.

I urge my right hon. Friend to reconsider the position. The Prime Minister must come to the Dispatch Box and speak on behalf of the whole United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said earlier on the matter. As with other remarks that have been made this afternoon, I am sure that my hon. Friend's remarks will be carefully noted.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Why is the Leader of the House so coy about telling us the date of the Easter recess, and particularly the day on which, theoretically, we are due back, especially bearing in mind

the fact that for last Easter he gave the information the preceding November? Is it because he does not want to give the game away about when liberation day is coming?

Mr. Newton: I have not seen myself as being coy about that or anything else. The difficulties of giving advance notice of the Easter recess have been clear to everybody for a long time.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to watch the highlights of last night's England *v.* Italy World cup qualifying match? It would be a short programme and he could no doubt fit it into his busy day. Is he aware that the vast majority of the population were denied the experience, perhaps thankfully, because it was not available on a terrestrial channel? It was available only to Sky subscribers. May we have a debate on sport soon to discuss the growing concentration of sporting events being televised only by Sky, thus denying them to many people who want to watch our national games?

Mr. Newton: I did not have the opportunity of seeing either the highlights, or what the hon. Gentleman evidently regards as the rather larger lowlights of the match, because I was doing other things. As always with his questions, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the National Heritage Secretary will study them with the care that they deserve.

Companies (Payment Practice)

4.4 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): I beg to move,

That the draft Companies Act 1985 (Directors' Report) (Statement of Payment Practice) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

As the Minister with responsibility for small business, I am introducing the regulations, and not my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs.

The regulations will help small businesses to gauge the fairness of the cash payment records of larger companies. Hon. Members will know that the problems caused by late payment continue to cause concern to small businesses. That was one of the major concerns highlighted last year, when we gave small firms the opportunity to shape future policies through the regional "Your Business Matters" conferences.

While there are no easy ways of tackling the problems caused by late payment, the Government are committed to helping small businesses. We have introduced a number of positive measures to tackle the problems associated with late payment. The regulations are another step along the way to helping small businesses to help themselves and to change the culture of payment practice.

In 1993, we consulted on a variety of possible ways in which payment performance could be disclosed in accounts. During the consultation, it became clear that the option of reporting payment policy and performance in the directors' report was supported quite strongly. In the light of that, we consulted again in February 1995 on that measure. As a result, in January last year, the Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation approved regulations requiring public limited companies and their private subsidiaries to disclose their payment policies in their directors' reports. That dealt with publication of payment policies.

However, concern continued to be expressed by small companies about the effects of late payment of commercial debt, most recently by delegates to the "Your Business Matters" conferences—the largest ever exercise in consulting small business, which the Prime Minister launched in 1995. He gave a commitment to act on every recommendation that "Your Business Matters" made. We returned to the issue of whether, and how, payment practice might be reported.

Before deciding on a method of payment performance, officials in my Department met a large number of interested parties, including a selection of large companies and small firms representative bodies, to test out possible methods of calculating payment performance. Our aim was to find a method that would not be too burdensome and that would be relatively straightforward for companies to produce and report in their annual accounts. Of all the companies that responded to the consultation, none identified any alternative preferable to the method proposed, and all were agreed that that option has the merit of being the least burdensome, as it is partly based on data that are already collected for accounts.

I come now to the details of the new disclosure requirement set out in the draft regulations. As I have already noted, we tried to find a straightforward way of stating payment performance, which provides useful

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information in a readily understandable way. We could not require companies to put into their accounts details of the time taken to pay every invoice. That would not only compromise commercial confidentiality but impose an impossible burden on companies. Therefore, any figure will have to be based on some form of averaging.

The regulations will require companies to state the figure, expressed in days, which bears the same proportion to the number of days in the year as the amount owed to year-end trade creditors bears to amounts invoiced by suppliers during the year. It might be helpful to the House if I illustrated that by a practical example. Suppose that a company has purchased £100,000-worth of supplies during the year and has at the end of the year some £10,000 of trade credit outstanding. Trade creditors therefore represent 10 per cent. of the amounts invoiced. Ten per cent. of the number of days in the year is 36.5 days. So the company would have to disclose that figure in the directors' report. That would be simple for the companies to do and would provide a ready and easy reckoner, so that the small company could realise just how a company paid its bills. The figure would help meet the needs of small suppliers, by providing additional and easily understandable information on the payment practices of larger companies.

There are a number of advantages to using that measure. As I have shown, it would be easy to calculate. It would be readily understood and interpreted. It would use the amount for trade creditors that appears separately in the annual accounts—except for banks and insurance companies—and require little additional work to identify the purchase amounts to be used in the calculation. The average will be comparable year on year in respect of individual companies and comparable across companies with trading activities of the same style and nature.

The new disclosure requirement is a logical next step to complement the payment policy disclosures that we introduced last year. It is therefore sensible that it should apply to the same companies—public limited companies and their large private subsidiaries. The new requirement will go into the directors' report alongside the policy disclosure. That should help people in smaller supplier companies, who will not have to go through pages of notes to the accounts to search for one figure.

That would also enable users of the information to keep track, in a relatively straightforward way, of how a company's performance measured up to its stated policy year on year. No doubt, it would give directors the opportunity to explain any divergence in the figures at annual general meetings, if the occasion demanded it.

Indeed, most small firms organisations have welcomed the regulations and the added value that they will provide to small businesses that trade with those larger public companies and their private subsidiaries. I echo those thoughts.

As to timing, the new regulations will come into force in relation to the report and accounts for financial years ending after 24 March 1997.

As the Minister who has responsibility for deregulation in my Department, I am aware as anyone, perhaps more than most, of the need to cut red tape wherever possible. However, that does not mean that there should be no regulation. I believe that this modest intervention is necessary, to help to discourage any large company from succumbing to the temptation to abuse its position. It is clearly a matter of balance.

It is necessary to ensure that the costs to business of the additional administrative burden of monitoring payment performance do not outweigh the prospective benefits of tightening up payment times. It is of no benefit to suppliers if the requirement to collate and publish figures forces large companies to incur significant additional administrative or other compliance costs. The statement, therefore, relies on the public presentation of information that is already collected for the accounts or otherwise readily available. That is why we have opted for the mechanism set out in the regulations. It is a balance between ensuring that valid information is provided and minimising the cost of producing that information.

Tackling late payment is, of course, not just about company reporting. We must see the measures in the context of our wider policies. The House will be aware that I announced in June last year that following a thorough review, the Government would not be legislating for a statutory right to interest. That review was informed by updated submissions from representative bodies that had responded to the public consultation on the matter in 1993; the "Your Business Matters" conferences; and detailed research by the university of Bradford and others.

It was clear from the review that there had been a significant shift in opinion against legislation, particularly by all but one of the small firms representative organisations. Concerns were expressed that legislation would have a negative impact on small businesses; that it would add little to existing rights; and that it might not actually be effective. In fact, it became clear that it was the view of small business that a statutory right to interest would be more likely to harm small businesses than help them.

The evidence from Europe, where most countries have a statutory right to interest, suggests a scant connection between such legislation and evidence of early payment. A statutory right to interest would still involve a small business man or woman appealing to courts, an option that is, in any case, open to them at the moment. It is for such reasons that eight of the nine small firms representative organisations that responded to the consultation rejected the imposition of a statutory right to interest.

Therefore, the view of small business is clear. Steps to eradicate late payment must be taken, but a statutory right to interest is not the solution. Good practice, like most things, begins at home. It is right that the Government should lead by example and ensure that their own house is in order. Departments and agencies are already required to pay their bills within contract terms or 30 days where alternative terms have not been agreed. All Departments have signed up to the Confederation of British Industry's prompt payments code and are required to monitor and publish their actual performance. In addition, the Prime Minister announced in March last year that the Government would publish each year a league table of Departments' payment performance, based on a rigorous system of measurement.

The House will be aware that, on 17 December, my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury published and made available to it the results of that first league table. It is worth noting that the vast majority of

Departments perform well. Those that have underperformed have been left in no doubt about the need to improve. I can assure the House that that is absolutely correct. I have received assurances that those improvements will happen.

Concerns were also expressed at the regional "Your Business Matters" conferences that local authorities were late payers. On 29 November, the Audit Commission published payment performance figures for local authorities, which showed that the average figure for settling invoices on time was 77 per cent. That was based on voluntary returns from 57 per cent. of local authorities. I do not know what hon. Members may think, but I do not believe that either of those figures is satisfactory.

Hon. Members will wish to be aware that the Audit Commission has now announced that it will be issuing a direction to all local authorities requiring payment performance to be a performance indicator for 1997-98. That information will help to inform businesses bidding for local authority contracts just how quickly they will be paid. We can, therefore, see that the regulations build on what the public sector is already doing—providing information to suppliers on when they will be paid.

In the 1994 White Paper on competitiveness, we also announced that we would work with the business community to develop a British Standard for prompt payment. That standard was duly developed by the CBI, to which I wish to pay tribute, with the support of the Department of Trade and Industry. BS7890, "British Standard for Prompt Payment", was launched by myself and the Economic Secretary in September 1996. The standard sets out basic principles of credit management and best practice. It should help to bring about improvements in payment practice and, ultimately, the cash flow of businesses.

We also said that we would look at the court systems as a means of recovering debts. The Lord Chancellor has introduced a number of changes to simplify and streamline court procedures, including raising the small claims limit to £3,000 and making it easier for small businesses to transfer cases to the High Court for enforcement by sheriff's officers.

I have made a personal commitment to take up any case where a small business is facing late payment from a large business. However, the majority of cases that come before me are more likely to involve the provision of poor-quality goods or services rather than late payment. Nevertheless, my open promise stands and any small firm that is not being paid on time by one of the top 100 companies or by any Government Department can approach me.

The Government cannot provide all the answers and there is much that small businesses can do to help themselves. Research by Bradford university has shown that small businesses that invest in front-ended credit management activities have significantly more invoices paid on time and suffer less from bad debts. In the light of that illuminating research, I have asked the chairmen of the business links in England and the equivalent bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to help small businesses to improve their credit management skills. Building on that help, my Department also publishes a free information pack on effective credit management procedures, called "Make the Cash Flow". It is produced in partnership with the Institute of Credit Management and all the main small firms organisations.

The regulations are a substantial step in reinforcing the culture of prompt payment, in addition to measures that the Government have already introduced. They deserve the support of the whole House.

4.20 pm

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): I welcome this statutory instrument, for which the Labour party has been calling for a number of years. I congratulate the Minister on having finally caught up with us.

The statutory instrument will add to the basket of measures that we plan to introduce and will at least ensure that small firms can find out about the payment practices of the large companies with which they trade. It is four years since Labour first called for the measure and two consultations have been held by Ministers. Given that the first, in 1993, found that 66 per cent. were in favour of acting, can the Minister explain why it has taken him four years to act in this vital area?

It is not too dramatic to say that late payment is the scourge of small firms. It can stop them growing and expanding or—more drastic—it can send basically good businesses to the wall. The Forum of Private Business recently surveyed its members about the issue. I pay tribute to the forum for its sterling work on behalf of its members, in respect of the appalling impact of late payment on small firms. The forum found that one in five of those surveyed had been prevented from growing by late payment. In its response to the Government's response, it explained:

"Late payment undermines certainty in commercial transactions, distorting business decisions . . . Small Businesses . . . are forced by late payment into increased reliance on loan capital. Given the cost of such funding late payment acts as a direct restraint on growth. This not only has a direct effect on prosperity and tax revenue, but also acts as a significant restraint on employment creation."

The Federation of Small Businesses estimated that, of 40,000 firms that had gone to the wall, 5,000 had done so because of late payment. The problem is not theoretical, but is a live issue that confronts many small businesses up and down the United Kingdom every day. I recently received a letter from a small industrial supplies firm in Glasgow, saying:

"We have huge problems and have to struggle day in and day out because of large companies deliberately withholding payments for months at a time. Millions of small firms are in a similar position."

That happens time and again and the bad news is that the problem of late payment in the UK is worsening. The 1996 Grant Thornton European survey found that the average payment period in the UK has increased from 48 days in 1995 to 50 days in 1996.

The Minister referred to the Government's record; let us consider it in a little detail, because it is called into question. I note the Minister's offer; only yesterday, my office had a call from a small, high-tech firm that has among its customers several Government Departments and large businesses. A year ago, after waiting more than two months for a bill of more than £1,000 to be paid by the Treasury, the firm was forced to suspend the service that it was supplying. What a wonderful example our Government set to businesses—they cannot even pay their own bills on time.

It was bad enough for the company to be owed money by the Treasury, but it is also waiting for the Department of Trade and Industry—graced by the Minister—to pay

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a bill of several hundred pounds. It has so far waited more than 90 days. No doubt Ministers will say that such instances are anecdotal and do not represent the great efforts that the Government are making.

It is interesting that the Government sometimes blame the very businesses that they are talking about. Only last June, the Minister told *The Independent*:

"Small companies are so delighted about winning an order they forget about getting paid."

More recently, the Minister told *The Mail on Sunday* that small firms are "unprofessional in credit control". Understandably, Stan Mendham, chief executive of the Forum of Private Business, responded—*[Interruption.]* The Minister may laugh, but this is what businesses are saying.

Stan Mendham, chief executive of the forum, responded to the Minister by saying:

"His facts are fundamentally wrong. I am angry and frustrated at these comments on an issue that causes horrendous problems for businesses."

As the Minister finds the subject so funny, perhaps he will comment on the Government's record in the light of remarks made by the Institute of Directors, which recently said in its "Enterprise" newsletter that it is

"well known that the government itself is one of the worst offenders when it comes to late payment.

The fact was resoundingly confirmed in a recent consultation exercise mounted by the IOD on the subject of late payment, with a significant proportion of members telling us that the government routinely pays its bills months late as a matter of course".

What a record for the Minister to have to defend in the House.

I hope that the explanation that the Minister gives later will be better than that of the Economic Secretary, to whom he referred. She explained in a letter to me that her Department had paid one quarter of its bills late because

"a member of staff fell ill late in 1994/95 and . . . the promptness of payment suffered".

She then told the director general of the CBI that that record was

"not the crime it had been portrayed".

When I meet representatives of small firms, they are incredulous that the Treasury, which at that time employed more than 1,000 people, had such a terrible record on late payment because one person fell ill. Presumably, when that member of the Treasury staff went off ill, he took the Treasury's cheque book with him. The fact that the Economic Secretary is the Minister in charge of reforming promptness of payment throughout Whitehall and in every Government Department makes the record worse.

Perhaps we can take a look at what the Economic Secretary has achieved. In December, the Government released figures for June to August 1996—they were to show the much-vaunted improvement after the Prime Minister had been embarrassed into telling Departments to pull up their socks, get on with it and see what they could do. Sadly, they were to bring him, and small firms, very little comfort. Nine Government Departments, including the Department of Health, the Department of Transport and the Serious Fraud Office, had a worse record in that period than in the previous year, 1995-96. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food paid one in five of its bills late.

Even the Deputy Prime Minister, who knows a thing or two about red bills, given his boasts about stringing along his creditors when he was in business, admits that the Government's record is dire. This year's White Paper on competitiveness, referring to the Government's record in that regard, said that there was

"a strong perception that"

Government Departments

"were often amongst the worst perpetrators of late payment."

In March 1996, the Prime Minister said:

"I believe we should take steps to generate embarrassment amongst those who wilfully and continually pay late"—

so I hope that from now on the Prime Minister will generate that embarrassment among Government Departments. If the Prime Minister will not do that, the Opposition are determined to do so.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has said many times, unlike the present Government, the next Labour Government will take tough action on late payment. We want to change the culture that allows large companies and Government Departments to treat small firms as a source of free credit, and we believe that it is necessary to have a basket of measures. *[Interruption.]* The Minister keeps laughing. I fail to understand what there is to laugh about in this serious subject, which drives many small and medium-sized enterprises to the wall.

Although we applaud the efforts of business organisations, banks and others to improve the credit control procedures of small firms, we do not believe such improvement to be the whole answer. A Labour Government will insist that Government Departments and local authorities pay on time and, after consulting about the best way to do so, we shall introduce a statutory right of interest on the late payment of debt above a given threshold. That would remove the financial advantage that large firms have in paying late. Only the United Kingdom and Ireland do not have a general right to interest embodied in legislation in the event of late payment of commercial debt.

I note what the Minister said when he cavalierly dismissed the arguments for a statutory right to interest. The results of all the surveys that have been conducted on that issue make interesting reading. In a Lloyds bank survey in March 1996, a full 75 per cent. of the businesses that responded welcomed a statutory right to interest. A recent "Business Pages" survey, in 1996, found that 69 per cent. of the businesses that responded supported a statutory right to interest.

Closer to home, a quarter of Conservative Members of Parliament showed support for the Labour party policy of a statutory right to interest by signing an early-day motion. Very many of the Minister's colleagues who are Conservative Members of the European Parliament also support a statutory right to interest, and they signalled that support recently.

What of the statutory instrument before us? We are pleased that, at long last, Ministers have seen the light. The principle behind it is, from one perspective, a freedom of information measure. However, the Minister has not yet answered all the questions surrounding the

new procedure. The Forum of Private Business and the Federation of Small Businesses are worried about how it will be enforced. Perhaps the Minister will comment.

The British Bankers Association has expressed significant anxieties about the formula used. It points out that the calculated period would be extremely distorted as a result of purchases falling unevenly towards the end of the year. A company that bought 100 widgets for 11 months and 200 in the 12th, and paid in 30 days, would be shown as taking 56 days to pay under the proposed method. As the British Bankers Association points out, that is not an uncommon scenario, as most organisations have an increase in purchasing activity towards the end of the financial year, as budget holders seek to spend the moneys allocated to them for that year. Almost more worrying, a company that paid very late throughout the year and then made few or no purchases in the last month would have a squeaky-clean record and appear a very prompt payer.

Will the Minister explain how he will avoid that situation, so that small firms get the most accurate information possible, and why he did not require large firms to state what percentage of their bills are paid within the given payment policy period, as Departments are required to do? That would mean that firms could easily be compared, just as, for example, we can look at the latest Government figures and see that the Department of Trade and Industry has a worse record on paying its bills on time than the Office of the National Lottery. The Minister may want to dwell on that point later. We could also compare the public and private sectors, which might prove to be an illuminating exercise.

When Ministers finally got round to taking up our suggestion that large firms should state their payment practices in their annual reports, the Under-Secretary of State said in a press release that the aim of the statutory instrument was to

"give small firms more details of the payment records of the larger companies with whom they may be considering doing business."

Yet even with that new measure, small firms will have to collect all the annual reports of the large companies with which they are considering doing business in order to make meaningful comparisons.

That is why I am pleased to announce that, in government, Labour will encourage small business organisations and others to consider collating that information and publishing it in league tables of prompt payers, so that small firms can decide for themselves which large firms to do business with. I have already spoken to both the Forum of Private Business and the Federation of Small Businesses about that suggestion and they are keen to be involved.

This is yet another example of Labour's determination to tackle the problem and reform Britain's red bill record. I commend our proposal to the House and to the small firms that are following the national debate on this vital issue, which makes so many of their lives a misery. Small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our economy and they deserve better support. They will get better support than this failing Government have been able to give them.

4.36 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I welcome this statutory instrument. As my hon. Friend the Minister admitted in his opening speech, it is new regulation on businesses, but I am encouraged to see that on today's Order Paper we have no fewer than four deregulation orders to decide later under the excellent new procedure of the Deregulation Committee. So that makes four motions to two, if one counts motion 3 on merchant shipping and ro-ro passenger ship survivability. Nevertheless, that sounds to me to be another desirable regulation and I think that four to two is not too bad in the circumstances.

I welcome the statutory instrument because the Small Business Bureau, of which I have the honour to be the deputy chairman, has been pressing for it for a long time. The excellent director of research of that organisation, Mr. Barry Baldwin, has pressed particularly hard in that respect. Under its modern policy of agreeing to everything that anyone else says, the Labour party has also been pressing for such regulations recently, so I am glad that they are welcomed all round.

Mrs. Roche: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it has been our policy for about four years and that it is the Government who have just woken up to it?

Sir John Cope: I cannot vouch for the time that the hon. Lady mentions. I have been conscious for only about a year of the Labour party pressing for it, but it may have made the suggestion earlier. However long ago it claims to have made the suggestion, the matter has been on the Small Business Bureau's agenda for a long time. That is where the proposal originated.

This is only one part of the DTI's strategy to combat the late payment of debt, as my hon. Friend the Minister explained in his opening remarks. It is a difficult problem and it will remain a difficult problem.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) quoted the Grant Thornton survey, saying that, between 1995 and 1996, the situation had become slightly worse—the average payment period increasing from 48 days to 50 days. She could have pointed out that, in 1993, it was 52 days, so depending on the period it is also an improvement. I do not think that there is a significant statistical difference in any of those figures.

This method, and the other methods that my hon. Friend the Minister outlined, is a better way to tackle the problem of late debt than the proposal, which has been around for many years, for statutory interest on late payment. I am, of course, well aware that the Forum of Private Business, particularly its very energetic chief executive, Stan Mendham, has campaigned tirelessly about this for many years, since the forum's inception. I have argued with him on many occasions, in various capacities, and I have never been in favour of statutory interest on late payment. The reasons deserve to be set out, as the proposal has been made.

My hon. Friend set out a couple of the reasons. When I was an articled clerk in an accountant's office, it was quite normal in those days—now a long time ago, I am sorry to say—for firms, particularly in some trades, to charge interest on late payment, or, as it was more often expressed, discount for prompt cash payment. That practice has greatly decreased in this country and is now relatively rare, but that is not so, I am told, in Germany, where it is quite common to offer a discount for prompt cash payment. I suspect that it exists informally to a certain extent in large retail stores and so on because of the growth in the use of credit cards, but as a formal mechanism the practice has declined.

[Sir John Cope]

The provision already exists in the law of this country to permit an interest charge on late payment, or discount on cash, if the firms concerned in the transaction wish to do it that way. The fact that few companies make use of that provision would seem to show that there is not a great call for it. Ultimately, a business has to calculate how hard to pursue the debt, and whether by pursuing it in one way or another it will be more likely to get the money.

A firm has to determine why the debt is being paid late. If the problem arises because the debtor is short of money, the fact that interest will be payable on the debt is of no help at all. If he cannot pay the capital, he will not be able to pay the interest either. Depending on the level of interest, it could still be cheaper for the debtor to take trade credit rather than a bank overdraft.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that these regulations will assist small to medium-sized enterprises in their knowledge about late payment? However, that is just one of many things to which they will look to assist them, for example, competitive interest rates, low inflation, and the continuation of the deregulation initiative started by the Government. There will, however, be a number of measures that they will be pitted against, such as the introduction of a minimum wage and the imposition of the 48-hour directive, both of which are measures that the Labour party, which pretends to support small to medium-sized enterprises, encourages.

Sir John Cope: That is quite correct. Many small businesses, particularly retail businesses, of which my hon. Friend has a great deal of experience, will not benefit from statutory interest on late payment, because by definition retail cash businesses have no debtors. They take cash over the counter. They are doing their best to manage their cash flow to try to sell the goods that they buy—before they have to pay for them, if possible. That is the ideal in retail business, and very small businesses are often retail businesses. As far as they are concerned, the proposal for statutory interest on debt is not desirable at all. It will harm them.

The other point is that the legislation would need to be incredibly complicated. Just think of the complexities of deciding the first day of the statutory period. In some cases it is easy: it is from the delivery of the goods. But in many cases it is much more complicated. As my hon. Friend the Minister pointed out, when goods are delivered or services given, disputes sometimes arise and people do not wish to pay until that dispute is sorted out—quite rightly.

When one has decided the first day of the statutory period, one then has to decide the length of an appropriate statutory period. For many businesses this differs according to the trade. The habit is different in some trades because the trades themselves differ. In many trades there is a retention. In the building trade, a proportion of the money is not paid until six months—sometimes longer—after the work has been completed, and that is quite normal. What is to happen about that? Provision would need to be made for all of that in the legislation, which would lead to such legislation being exceptionally complicated.

Sir David Mitchell (North–West Hampshire): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, in terms of late payment, one small business is as guilty as another, and very often small business customers are late in paying, not just large ones? If one were to make early payment a legal requirement, many small businesses would be in severe financial difficulty as a result of having to pay more frequently.

What is to be done with this new information is quite important. I ask my right hon. Friend to consider the situation of the Government as contractors; the Government place an enormous number of contracts, and there are an enormous number of sub-contractors. Will the Government take account of late payment in deciding whether to place contracts? Will that be a requirement? That would be really effective.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. That is the second rather lengthy intervention that we have had. I caution hon. Members against long interventions, which by their nature should be short. There is no great pressure to speak at the moment as far as I can see.

Sir John Cope: It was, nevertheless, a very good intervention, and well worth while if I may say so.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I judge only the length, not the quality.

Sir John Cope: I agree entirely with that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir D. Mitchell). The point about statutory interest on late debt is that if a business is reluctant to enforce through the courts the collection of the principal sum that it is owed, will it not also be just as reluctant to try to enforce any interest that is payable as well? In difficult cases where a business is having difficulty extracting money, the proposal would be of little value to business.

It is for all those reasons that I think that the approach adopted by my hon. Friend the Minister, in this statutory instrument, and in the other measures that he outlined, is the correct approach to the very serious problem of late debt.

4.48 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I welcome the proposed regulations. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that late payment can have a crippling effect on small and medium-sized enterprises. Although I entirely take the point that some small companies are guilty of late payment, it remains that more often small businesses are the victims of late payment, being dependent on tight budgeting to realise investment projects and to consolidate markets.

To be blunt, late payment provokes simple questions of integrity and business ethics. The withholding of moneys, for whatever reason, should be dealt with firmly and, in my opinion, by legislation. Today's proposals are at least

a step in the right direction. The problem is widespread, as it has become normal practice for many large companies to delay payments. The inclusion of payment practice in the directors' report for each financial year will make employees and shareholders aware of their company's payment practice. If their company follows a specified and approved code of conduct, the public or shareholders may rest assured that it is following good business practice.

The key objective is—and must be—to change the culture of bad business practice, which has legitimised payment as an accounting device in order to create the appearance of healthy balance sheets and to provide short-term finance dishonestly. We welcome proposals to encourage better payment practices and to improve all credit management. However, we believe that the outlined proposals do not go far enough. We can deal fully and effectively with the withholding of moneys only by introducing effective legislation. In the past few years, an alarming number of small businesses across the United Kingdom have failed—more than 20,000 failed in 1996.

Such businesses provide jobs, capital, investment and enterprise, and the economy could not survive without them. Yet a massive number of small businesses are failing or finding themselves stuck in a quagmire of economic difficulty and financial hardship. At a time when more than ever we need strong economic growth, we should take measures to eradicate irresponsible business practices such as late payment of debt. We should create the best circumstances for small businesses to grow and prosper.

Although the new regulations cover stating payment practice, it would not be mandatory for companies to inform their suppliers or creditors of their practice. Directors' reports do not have a particularly wide circulation, tending to go only to major shareholders. They would rarely be distributed to other suppliers. Therefore, we believe that the answer is to introduce a statutory right to interest. There are difficulties involved with such a move: as the right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) said, legislation would be complicated, and some of the similar regimes abroad are not particularly effective. However, Sweden and Germany offer statutory redress against overdue payments—including interest on late payment of debts—that is among the best offered by our continental partners, and they demonstrate consistently lower average payment periods.

A statutory right to interest would establish an important catalyst for motivating companies to pay on time. Although I accept that the Government genuinely wish to see the business culture improve, we must provide a stick as well as a carrot. Any such legislation would require widespread consultation with small companies and other interested organisations. I recognise that there has been a consultative process, and that some voices have been raised against the statutory right to interest proposal. However, that does not alter the fact that many businesses and their representatives continue to argue strongly for the measure. We must include provisions to ensure that debts are retrieved efficiently and cost-effectively and that creditors' contracts are not adversely affected.

I do not believe that the proposals will sufficiently reduce the burden of late payment of debt on small businesses, but I welcome them as a starting point from which further action can be taken.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Companies Act 1985 (Directors' Report) (Statement of Payment Practice) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.

House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I must announce that Madam Speaker has selected amendment (b), standing in the name of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

4.53 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. Michael Bates): I beg to move,

That Schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 be amended as follows:—

PART I OF SCHEDULE 1

Amendment

1. For the entry 'Judge of the Court of Session' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Judge of the Court of Session, or Temporary Judge appointed under the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990.

PART II OF SCHEDULE 1

Additional entries

2. The following entries shall be inserted at the appropriate places:—

The Antarctic Act Tribunal established under regulations made under the Antarctic Act 1994.

The East of Scotland Water Authority.

The Land Authority for Wales.

The Local Government Staff Commission (England).

The North of Scotland Water Authority.

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board.

The Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council or any committee established by that council under paragraph 10(1) of Schedule 9 to the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

The Training and Employment Agency Advisory Board in Northern Ireland.

The West of Scotland Water Authority.

Entry omitted

3. The following entry shall be omitted:—

The Scottish Development Agency.

PART III OF SCHEDULE 1

Additional entries

4. The following entries shall be inserted at the appropriate places:—

Adjudicator appointed under section 5 of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995.

Adjudicator for the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Contributions Agency.

Assessor appointed for the purposes of section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Chairman of an Agricultural Land Tribunal or member of a panel appointed under paragraph 14 or 15 of Schedule 9 to the Agriculture Act 1947.

Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

Chairman or Chief Executive of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils.

Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the English Sports Council.

Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Financial Reporting Council.

Chairman or any director of the Further Education Development Agency.

Chairman of Investors in People UK.

Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council.

Chairman or Director of the National Forest Company.

Chairman of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

Chairman of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council.

Chairman of the Rural Development Council for Northern Ireland.

Chairman or any member, not also being an employee, of the State Hospitals Board for Scotland.

Chairman of the United Kingdom Sports Council.

Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

Civil Service Commissioner.

Civil Service Commissioner for Northern Ireland.

Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

Any director of Horticulture Research International in receipt of remuneration.

Director General of Gas for Northern Ireland.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland.

Member of the staff of the Forestry Commissioners.

Member of the legal panel of persons available to act as chairmen of Registered Homes Tribunals.

Member of the legal panel of persons available to act as chairmen of Registered Homes Tribunals in Northern Ireland.

Any member of the property commission established by virtue of section 19 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

Any member of a residuary body established by virtue of section 18 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 who is in receipt of remuneration.

Any member of the staff commission established by virtue of section 12 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

President of the Industrial Tribunals (England and Wales), President of the Industrial Tribunals (Scotland) or member of a panel of persons appointed to act as chairmen or other members of industrial tribunals.

President of the Special Educational Needs Tribunal, or member of a panel of persons appointed to act as chairmen or other members of that tribunal.

Entries omitted

5. The following entries shall be omitted:—

Chairman, or Director General and Deputy Chairman, of the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Chairman or member of a panel of deputy-chairmen of an Agricultural Land Tribunal.

Chairman of the Business & Technology Council.

Paid Chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee for Great Britain established under section 56 of the Transport Act 1962.

Chairman of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Chairman of the Land Authority for Wales.

Chairman of the Letchworth Garden City Corporation.

Chairman of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council.

Any Chairman of the Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal.

Chairman of the Science and Engineering Research Council.

Chairman of the Scottish Legal Aid Board.

Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Sports Council.

Chairman of the Training and Employment Agency Advisory Board in Northern Ireland.

Delegate for Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to the Central Rhine Commission.

Director of British Telecommunications p.l.c. nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or government department.

Director of Northern Ireland Airports Limited.

Director of the successor company (within the meaning of the British Steel Act 1988) being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

Director of the successor company (within the meaning of the British Technology Group Act 1991) being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

Director of a successor company (within the meaning of Part II of the Electricity Act 1989), being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

Any member of the Insolvency Practitioners Tribunal in receipt of remuneration.

Member of a Wages Council appointed under paragraph 1(b) of Schedule 2 to the Wages (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

President, or member of a panel of chairmen, of industrial tribunals established under section 12 of the Industrial Training Act 1964.

Secretary of the Medical Research Council.

Other amendments

6.—(1) In the entry 'Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards', for 'Vice-Chairman' there shall be substituted 'Medical Director'.

(2) In the entry 'Chairman of the Economic and Social Research Council', after 'Chairman' there shall be inserted 'Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive'.

(3) In the entry 'Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland', the words 'or Deputy Chairman' shall be omitted.

(4) In the entry 'Chairman of the Livestock Marketing Commission for Northern Ireland', for 'Marketing' there shall be substituted 'and Meat'.

(5) In the entry 'Chairman of any of the National Boards for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting constituted under section 5 of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979', there shall be inserted at the end 'or any member of any of those Boards appointed at a salary'.

(6) In the entry 'Chairman or non-executive member of a National Health Service trust established under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 or the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978', for 'non-executive member' there shall be substituted 'non-executive director'.

(7) In the entry 'Chairman of the Natural Environment Research Council', after 'Chairman' there shall be inserted 'Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive'.

(8) For the entry 'Member of a panel of chairmen of industrial tribunals established under Article 30 of the Industrial Training (Northern Ireland) Order 1984' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Member of a panel of persons appointed to act as chairmen or other members of industrial tribunals in Northern Ireland.

(9) In the entry 'Rent officer or deputy rent officer appointed in pursuance of a scheme under section 63 of the Rent Act 1977', the words 'or deputy rent officer' shall be omitted.

PART IV OF SCHEDULE 1

Entry omitted

7. The entry relating to Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant or Lieutenant for an islands area in Scotland shall be omitted.

Other amendments

8.—(1) In the entry relating to Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant or Lieutenant for a region in Scotland—

(a) for 'a region' there shall be substituted 'an area'; and

(b) for the words from 'such part' to 'Majesty' there shall be substituted 'the area'.

(2) In the entry relating to Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant or Lieutenant for the district of the city of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh or Glasgow—

(a) the words 'the district of' shall be omitted; and

(b) for 'the district in' there shall be substituted 'the city in'.

The motion seeks the approval of the House to an amendment by Order in Council of schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975. As hon. Members are aware, the Act is concerned with the maintenance of the independence of the House and the safeguarding of hon. Members from undue influence by the Executive through the exercise of patronage. Schedule 1 to the Act lists those offices whose holders are thereby disqualified from membership of the House.

It has been usual practice for any legislation that establishes new offices or winds up existing ones to amend schedule 1 accordingly. The 1975 Act is therefore reprinted from time to time in accordance with the provisions of the Act to incorporate such amendments. The last reprint was made on 6 January 1994. A further reprint will be ordered after the new order has been made. In addition, from time to time, it is necessary to use the procedure outlined in section 5(1) of the Act in order to bring schedule 1 up to date by Order in Council.

This section provides for the schedule to be amended following an affirmative resolution of the House by adding offices that have been created by administrative action, by amending or correcting existing entries and by deleting offices that no longer exist or where statutory disqualification is no longer appropriate. This procedure has been followed on 10 previous occasions, the first in

[Mr. Michael Bates]

1961 and the last in June 1993. Copies of the explanatory note describing the amendments in detail have been made available in the Vote Office since 6 February.

Ministers have been individually responsible for the details of the additional entries and deletions that cover the offices within their areas of responsibility. They have based their judgments on the same general principles and criteria that have been followed in the past and are covered by the explanatory note. Of the 85 amendments covered, 48 are new entries, 25 are deletions and 12 are amendments to existing entries. Approximately 3,400 office holders will be brought within the scope of schedule 1, and up to 240 others will no longer be disqualified. That includes offices that have been abolished. There is, therefore, a net increase of 3,160 disqualified office holders. Of the 3,400 added to the schedule, up to 2,700 are lay members of industrial tribunals in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the vast majority of whom are already precluded from sitting as Members of Parliament by the terms governing their appointment.

We propose that the de minimis level—the level below which paid officers in the gift of the Crown or Ministers do not normally attract disqualification—should remain at £8,000, as agreed in 1993. Of course, the de minimis level has no effect on the level of remuneration received by office holders. Its purpose is merely to prevent trivial disqualification. As we are following a well-established procedure, I commend the motion to the House.

4.56 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the Minister for not being present for the beginning of the debate.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): Disgraceful.

Mr. Rooker: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am reminded of the debates that I read while preparing my speech. When a similar motion was moved in 1985, my colleague with the relevant responsibility was not present. As I had spoken on the previous legislation, I became the first speaker for the Opposition; so I have had my comeuppance.

It is interesting to note that we are not dealing with a statutory instrument or with delegated legislation, but are being asked to amend a schedule to an Act of Parliament on the say-so of a motion on the Order Paper. That might have some advantages, in that the motion is clearly amendable. However, it means that the normal scrutiny procedures of the House will not apply: we will not be able to examine the proposals, take evidence and ask questions. I shall return to that issue later.

I welcome the explanatory notes on the motion—although I think that they should have been available earlier. They were not available last Thursday when I left the building, so the Vote Office posted them to me on Friday and I read them during the weekend. In previous years, the notes were available from the Vote Office up to three or four weeks before debate in the House. The notes comprise an excellent, up-to-date list of the quangos established by the Government—many salaries run to six figures—so it is a useful addition to our weaponry. The notes are not available for general sale: there is no price or reference number on the document. In a way, it is the main meat of the motion.

Other than the holders of office set out in section 1 of the main Act, such as civil servants, the police, the armed forces and members of foreign legislatures, those who are disqualified from membership of the House—the number runs to well over 1 million people—are not covered by statutory criteria. There are ambiguities, and there is a good deal of ministerial discretion as to who is and is not disqualified. We are now adding another 3,400 of our fellow citizens to the list of those disqualified from membership of the House of Commons. It is clear that membership of the House should be as open and as accessible to as many citizens as possible, and that disqualifications must be clear, unambiguous and reasonable.

Although it is called the House of Commons Disqualification Act, it does not cover all the people who are disqualified from membership of the House. Bits and pieces of a tabloid newspaper are being put through our doors by a fictional political party, which exists only in the bank balances of its leader. A member of a foreign legislature is not able to be a Member of the House. We can have dual membership of this House and the European Parliament. That usually means a seat in the United Kingdom Parliament and a seat in the European Parliament, but I am not sure about the arrangements. How does the Act apply to a person who sits in the European Parliament for a constituency in France and seeks membership of the United Kingdom Parliament? Perhaps the Minister could take advice on whether it is lawful for the leader of the Referendum party to seek membership of the House while being a Member of the European Parliament for a foreign nation.

The Act is comprehensive. I want to draw some of the paradoxes to the House's attention by way of illustration—I would obviously be out of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I went into substantial detail. Our fellow citizens are not treated equally: some are disqualified from being Members of the House under schedule 1, and some are disqualified under other Acts of Parliament.

The legislation that applies to ordained ministers of religion goes back to the House of Commons (Clergy Disqualification) Act 1801. When preparing for this debate, I was struck by the recent publication by Robert Blackburn, reader in public law at King's college, called "Electoral System in Britain". He delves into the history of certain aspects of the process, including parliamentary candidates. He gave examples that occurred in Oxfordshire. A candidate at the last general election in Oxford, West and Abingdon is disqualified for life from membership of the House because he used to be an ordained priest of the Roman Catholic Church, even though he has now resigned the priesthood. If he had won the seat, the House might have addressed the issue. Bruce Kent did not win, but even if he changes his faith or declares no faith, the fact that he was once an ordained priest of the Roman Catholic Church means that he is disbarred for life from membership of the House.

That does not apply to someone who is disbarred because he is a civil servant. The right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) was a distinguished former Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary, and had previously been a civil servant.

One day, he was a civil servant and disqualified from membership of the House; the next day, he resigned and was able to be a candidate and serve as a Member of the House. The same applies to a minister of the Church of England, who is disqualified but can also resign and then be a candidate. Priests of the Catholic Church are disqualified for life, whether or not they remain in their faith. That is one of the inconsistencies and anomalies.

The Minister is now adding 3,400 persons to the list of those banned from membership of the House. He referred in his short introduction to the largest group: the 2,700 of our fellow citizens who serve on industrial tribunals. They are unpaid lay people who do a valuable job for society. They are required to be politically impartial in the execution of their judicial function: that is part of the operation of a tribunal. Why have they not been added to schedule 1 before? Industrial tribunals have existed for the best part of 30 years. Has consultation taken place? It is part of their terms and conditions that they cannot be Members of the European Parliament or Members of the House. Why change now?

The schedule was updated in 1993, 1985 and 1987: every three or four years, although not necessarily tying in with general elections; sometimes it has been twice in a Parliament. At no time have the general lay members of industrial tribunals been added to the list of those disqualified from serving in the House.

Some hon. Members may be justices of the peace, who are not technically banned from serving in the House. Members are advised not to sit as JPs, but if they can manage the requirement of 26 sessions a year, not in their own constituency and not as a paid stipendiary magistrate, technically nothing prevents them from being elected as a Member of the House. There is therefore a paradox if the requirement is for political neutrality or impartiality in a judicial function.

There is also a contradiction in respect of local government councillors who serve as magistrates, even in the locality of their council. Why are they allowed to continue to undertake a function for which they have to be judicially impartial while not being disqualified from membership of the House, whereas we disqualify the lay members of industrial tribunals? That does not make sense. It is not equal and fair treatment for people carrying out the same sort of quasi-judicial function. It is unfair that one group of 2,700 people—it includes members of industrial tribunals in Northern Ireland—is disqualified.

The schedule has been added to and has grown like Topsy at ministerial whim, without proper scrutiny by the House, because of the manner in which it is done—by resolution and not by statutory instrument. It gets worse. When I read previous debates, I was reminded of what happened in 1985, when I had to make a brief contribution. Full-time members of the judiciary are rightly disqualified from being Members of the House, but part-time members of the judiciary are not disqualified, as we shall hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). Why should a part-time paid judge, who acts as a recorder, be able to sit in Parliament, and a part-time unpaid member of an industrial tribunal be disqualified? It is not fair, does not make sense, and is wholly inconsistent and illogical.

I invite anyone who thinks that I am nit-picking to look at the first amendment to schedule 1. The Secretary of State for Scotland is disqualifying temporary judges from membership of the House.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Quite right too.

Mr. Rooker: Absolutely, quite right.

To disqualify temporary judges in Scotland and lay members of industrial tribunals yet allow part-time judges in England to sit in the House is inconsistent and unfair. I raised this point in the debate on 22 July 1985 at column 801. I asked about recorders and was fobbed off by the then Minister. He referred us to an earlier debate on 12 April 1983. I have taken the precaution of reading that debate again. Why part-time judges under the guise of recorders can sit in the House was not satisfactorily explained. We were given the historical reasons for the acceptability of that, but I did not find them satisfactory then, and I do not think that they are satisfactory now—especially in view of the fact that we are ruling out changes in regard to lay, unpaid members of industrial tribunals.

In our debate on 22 July 1985, when we discussed schedule 1, my speech was followed by one from a Conservative Back Bencher who challenged the whole idea that Ministers could add to the list of people disqualified from membership of the House as we are doing today. He made what I considered a powerful case for the criteria to be made clearer and more precise: it can be found in columns 802 and 803 of the *Official Report*. He described the current practice as "highly undesirable".

There are four criteria, and I ask the Minister to confirm that they are not statutory. The first criterion refers to

"offices of profit in the gift of the Crown or Ministers",

which includes salaried, pensionable and certain fee-paid posts. There is a de minimis of £8,000. People whose remuneration is below that level can, however, be excluded at the Minister's discretion.

Also excluded are

"certain positions of control in companies in receipt of Government grants and funds, to which Ministers usually, though not necessarily, make nominations".

I shall return to that in a moment.

The third criterion refers to

"offices imposing duties which, with regard to time and place, would prevent their holders from fulfilling Parliamentary duties satisfactorily"—

which means that they would take up too much time, or otherwise prevent a Member from attending Parliament.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I had to re-read that.

Mr. Rooker: So did I—as, indeed, I have in the past.

As I have said before, I think that it would be difficult to legislate for a full-time House, but these are non-statutory criteria operating against some of our fellow citizens.

The fourth category is

"offices whose holders are required to be, or to be seen to be, politically impartial."

That covers many of the examples that we are discussing today.

[Mr. Rooker]

As I have said, in 1985 a Conservative Back Bencher described the process as highly undesirable. He questioned the payment levels involved in disqualification, and claimed—I believe there were some grounds for his claim—that people were disqualified when it was not possible to test whether they should be, because of the lack of scrutiny. He called for a Select Committee to look at the draft resolution each time, and report to the House before it came to us for approval. If it were a statutory instrument, that would be possible: the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments could examine it, and take advice and evidence.

I agreed with that Member of Parliament then, and I agree with him now. So why do we have amendments Nos. 16 and 38? The amendments are not numbered on the Order Paper—for our inconvenience—but they are numbered 16 and 38 in the set of notes with which we have been provided. They are listed at lines 42 and 43 on page 1898 of the Order Paper, and at lines 72 and 73 on page 1899, and both are promoted by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It so happens that the Minister—the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg)—is the Member who spoke from the Back Benches in 1985, and said that this was a wholly undesirable process. The House is almost empty and there is plenty of time, but I am not hunting for the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I prepared my speech three days ago, well before I knew about next week's censure motion.

Amendment No.16 covers the

"Chairman of an Agricultural Land Tribunal or a member of a panel appointed under paragraph 14 or 15 of Schedule 9 to the Agriculture Act 1947."

The new entry will bring up to 306 office holders into the schedule—306 more citizens who cannot become Members of Parliament. We are given the same old argument that such people must be politically impartial in the execution of their judicial functions.

The new entry in amendment No. 38 is

"Any director of Horticulture Research International in receipt of remuneration."

That, too, is promoted by the Minister of Agriculture.

I have a question, the answer to which I have not been able to discover fully, even from our experts in the Library. Horticulture Research International was set up on 1 April 1990, in response to the recommendations of a Government study. Why were the 10 paid directors who have been added to schedule 1 today not included in 1993, when the schedule was last updated? What has happened since that has caused them to be on this list, although they were not on the earlier list? It is possible that, although the organisation was set up in 1990, no one was paid until after 1993; that is what I have not been able to establish by looking at the annual reports in the Library.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): It may be worth emphasising, for the benefit of those who read the report of the debate, that it is possible to give up such a position before taking a seat in the House.

Mr. Rooker: Earlier—the hon. Gentleman probably was not in the Chamber yet—I drew attention to one of the paradoxes that are involved in the legislation. Most of those who are barred from membership—more than 1 million people—can become eligible for parliamentary seats by giving up their posts, but that does not apply to someone who has been an ordained priest in the Catholic Church. That cannot be wiped out: those people are banned for life, whatever happens in the future.

There is a procedure—although I do not know the details—in respect of, I believe, the armed forces and the police. I understand that a little sub-committee at the Home Office, comprising six former Members of Parliament and a couple of other people, adjudicates on whether people can give up certain positions in order to stand for Parliament. Its purpose is to ensure that frivolous people are not trying to get out of the armed forces, as probably the most famous example did many years ago—but I shall not go down that byway. The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) is right: people can give up their posts voluntarily.

What worries me most are the inconsistencies and apparent unfairness. I have mentioned people who serve on industrial tribunals, part-time judges and local councillors who serve on the bench. The criteria and rules applying to those people are not the same, and there seems to be no good reason for that.

Mr. Mackinlay: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said, but let me ask a rhetorical question: would not members of industrial tribunals face a real dilemma if they intended to stand for Parliament in a few weeks' time? They would have to resign before the election, because they cannot resign after they have been elected. That strikes me as demonstrably unfair. Having resigned from the tribunal, an unsuccessful candidate for election would have to be beholden to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment: it would be for the Secretary of State to reinstate that person.

Mr. Rooker: It is some five years since I signed the nomination papers to be a parliamentary candidate, but I have a feeling that a candidate has to sign a statement that he is not excluded by the terms of the House of Commons Disqualification Act. Being on the list means that a person cannot be a legal candidate, which is why I question how Bruce Kent could possibly have been a legal candidate in the last election. Clearly, under the 1801 Act, he could not have taken his seat in the House if he had been successful.

The House is so slothful in bringing its procedures up to date that we would be forced to face the issue only if someone succeeded in an election in those circumstances. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South will confirm, however, shortly after the election of a Member of Parliament we had to pass a retrospective motion enabling him to remain a Member, all because he had given a few hours' paid service as a medical adviser to a medical tribunal. I think that it was the late Lord Winstanley—I hope I am not doing him a disservice; I believe that he is now deceased—who served as a Liberal Member of Parliament, representing, I think, Colne Valley.

The House could rectify the position if something like that happened, but there would be one hell of a row, particularly as we have not set up proper procedures to ensure that there is fairness, openness and logicality in the way in which we disqualify more than 1 million people from being Members of the House.

Mr. Mackinlay: Was it not absurd that, in 1979, Dame Sheila Roberts was elected to the European Parliament in

the Conservative cause, was a successful candidate for London South West and then found that she was disqualified? In what was a technical anomaly, there was no such mechanism for her position to be rectified, as in the case of Dr. Michael Winstanley, the former Member for Cheadle and then for Colne Valley. There had to be a by-election, at enormous public cost, which Dame Sheila again subsequently won—with a diminished majority, but she won. It was an absurd circus for that Conservative Member of the European Parliament to be elected, to be disqualified and then to have to stand again, all because there had not been true and reasonable understanding of the ground rules and no mechanism was in place to remedy what was demonstrably an error.

Mr. Rooker: It all comes down to the fact that there is not really a consolidated list and a formal structure whereby that list can be scrutinised and we have all the people who are disqualified from membership of the House. We are dealing here, it is true, with the schedule to the main Act, but the Act, as I have said more than once, is not the only Act that disqualifies people from membership of the House. In an open, accessible and pluralistic Parliament, there should be good grounds, as we approach the 21st century, to review wholesale disqualification, some of the rules of which, as I say, go back to the early part of the 19th century. Such a review is long overdue.

Having considered this in some detail in recent times, having considered the matter in a different capacity and having discussed it with one or two of my colleagues, it is something that a new Government would consider. That may be done by a Select Committee, by someone who is independent or by the Nolan committee.

This has grown like Topsy. It is shot full with anomalies, inconsistencies, unfairnesses and illogicalities. It is right that there has to be some sort of disqualification procedure; it is clearly necessary for the natural categories of disqualification: the police, the civil service and armed forces. However, matters have got out of hand when the list can be added to by ministerial discretion, where there are no clear criteria. What is more, the House has failed to set up a proper scrutiny procedure so that we can go through these things in detail, instead of having to deal with them in just an hour and a half this evening.

5.22 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I acknowledge that I was not here at the beginning of the debate, but I did hear the relevant points that were made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker). I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that the anomalous position involving people who have been ordained in the Roman Catholic Church needs to be sorted out. Roman Catholics are discriminated against in a number of ways. For instance, Roman Catholic bishops cannot pick the title of their diocese, but that is slightly away from this debate. The anomalous position of two people, one of whom has been ordained as a Roman Catholic priest and one of whom has been ordained as an Anglican priest, should be on all fours. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ask someone to find a way in which the House can consider dealing with that anomaly. It is not the most important issue, but it is one of fairness.

There is an alternative way in which to deal with some of the positions in part III of schedule 1. Given that most of the people involved are appointed by Ministers, there is no reason why Ministers should not say that they will disappoint anyone who is successful in an election. That would solve some of the problems of people who would want to continue with their ordinary lives, if they are unsuccessful candidates. It can be done in a simple way. Where the appointment cannot be taken away, it may be possible to say that people will not be able to sit. There may be other administrative ways in which to deal with that.

Outside the Chamber, I was reminded by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) that I had some form, if I may put it that way, over noticing that some of our colleagues have sat as temporary judges and assistant temporary judges—let us say as recorders. I cannot remember precisely what I might have said; I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will comment on that. If there are examples of people perhaps feeling that in some way they have not received justice because someone who has some prominence beneath his wig has sat either as a justice of the peace or as a judge, they should certainly be able to object in advance.

Whether people should be prohibited from sitting as judges or as recorders is not something on which I have strong views today, but I do believe that the answer to most of the questions put by the hon. Member for Perry Barr, the Opposition spokesman, is that it is not the highest priority in Government Departments to consider whether new or adapted jobs should join the list. It is one of those things where there is an occasional trawl. People cough up possible positions that might be held to be suitable for disqualification. At the margin, there will always be difficulties.

I am not sure that it is right to accept necessarily the criticism that doing it by amendment makes it less easy for the House to consider the matter than doing it by secondary legislation. By secondary legislation we do not have the opportunity of tabling amendments. At least with this procedure, we do.

It is not the most important issue because the House would, I suspect, overturn nearly all disqualifications, were that to be tested. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) repeatedly stood for the House of Commons, although he was disqualified under previous rules because he had inherited a place in the House of Lords. The House did then make changes to allow people not to take up peerages or to drop hereditary peerages.

I say in passing that some of the positions in part III would not disqualify a Member of the House of Lords from sitting there. I think that I am right in saying that a Member of the House of Lords can be chairman of a research council. The Earl of Selborne served in a distinguished way on the Agriculture Research Council. I do not argue for consistency. The position of holding an office of profit under the Crown is worth protecting. I do not make any adverse comment about prohibiting some people in the more senior ranks of the civil service from being actively involved in national politics, but I do not think that we want to screw things down so far that those who want to take part in local politics should be discouraged from doing so, if it is compatible with their role.

In general we get these things about right, but if we ever get to the stage where we are wanton or careless in the people we do not allow to stand for Parliament, we should be careful. It is far better to disqualify people after

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

election, if necessary, than to stop them standing. We want to allow the widest range of people to stand, even though a fair number of them can be reasonably sure that they will not be elected in any particular election.

5.26 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I beg to move amendment (b), in paragraph 1, after "following entry" insert—

'Additional Entry

1A. The following entry shall be inserted at the appropriate place:—

"Recorder and Assistant Recorder".'.

I must join the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) in referring to previous debates. He did indeed speak on 12 April 1983, and he used these words:

"As we are close to a general election, it is not for me to spell out exactly which part of the Government's policy I thoroughly support and which part I support, especially as the debate is to end at half past 11."—[*Official Report*, 12 April 1983; Vol. 40, c. 771.]

Therefore, he did participate in that debate, when I moved virtually the same amendment as I have moved tonight.

I should also inform the House, to make this a comprehensive survey perhaps, as of now, that the other part of the hon. Gentleman's contribution related to what appeared to be an anomaly to some of us at that time: the appointment of a Member of the House, the former right hon. Robert Mellish, who had been the Opposition Chief Whip—he is now a noble Lord in another place. He was the deputy chairman of the London Docklands development corporation, which was a salaried office, but one for which he chose, understandably, not to receive remuneration.

There was an anomaly of an office of profit under the Crown, which I would have thought, in normal terms, that would have been. Some people—I should add that the then Robert Mellish's constituency was included in that region—naturally felt that he might have gained advantage as a Member by being vice-chairman and, at the same time, that he gained advantage as vice-chairman by being a Member, particularly as a Secretary of State of another party was involved. I make that point only because the anomaly has, happily, disappeared—although happily Lord Mellish has not.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on his interesting opening speech. We obviously do not disagree on these matters along party lines. There is a case for a Act to consolidate the historic prohibitions and remove the anomalies. It would not matter if that caused repetition, because the later Act would displace the former.

There are two separate issues before us. One is the prohibition on certain citizens standing as candidates—which is perhaps overdone, as the hon. Member for Eltham suggested—and sitting as Members. Some people should not be candidates—judges of the High Court, for example—but many more should be allowed to stand on the assumption that they would resign their office if they won. They could sign a document to that effect.

The other issue, which affects fewer people, is the prohibition on sitting Members being appointed to offices of profit. If sitting Members are allowed to act as recorders, as they are in England, they have an advantage. They are not allowed to act in a judicial capacity in Scotland and that is the anomaly. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) pointed out that there are requirements for political impartiality for members of the judiciary. If a Member is appointed to sit as a recorder or an assistant recorder, he will be politically partial unless he sits as an independent, which is unusual. That situation is constitutionally dubious, as I shall mention later, and should be tidied up.

I understand the objection that my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr made about the procedure today. On the other hand, it has some advantages. We are not restricted to only an hour and a half's debate, as would be the case with a statutory instrument.

Mr. Rooker: We have only an hour and a half today.

Mr. Spearing: In that case, I must watch the length of my speech. The matter is being addressed by a motion of the House and we have been able to table amendments—an opportunity that I have taken.

We need better documentation. I am grateful for the explanatory note, but a White Paper with a House of Commons number would have been better. We do not know who published the explanatory note, because it does not say, and it is not signed by a Minister, or even on his behalf by a civil servant.

On 12 April 1983, no fewer than 15 Members were recorders or assistant recorders. Now there are only three, and I have informed the right hon. and hon. Members concerned of my amendment. I believe that their character, their knowledge of the House and their knowledge of the law make them capable of playing a different role when they put on a wig, even if they occupy a senior position in a political party or appear on television programmes on important civic matters. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, with your colleagues in the Chair, are an excellent example of the ability of right hon. and hon. Members to switch into different roles.

However, that ability is not immediately apparent to those who send us here. They find it difficult to accept the idea that someone can one day sit, fully bewigged and in a judicial capacity, alongside full-time judges—who stand apart from the rest of us in many ways, and properly so—and the next day be here dealing with the political hurly-burly. It is a constitutional anomaly. We are always told by constitutionalists that the judiciary, the legislature and the Executive each have their own functions. The Executive is created and destroyed by the legislature, and is accountable to it. The judiciary and the legislature are properly separated. Of course, there has to be a join somewhere, and in England and Wales it comes in the persons of the Attorney-General, the Lord Chancellor and the Solicitor-General. In Scotland, of course, the Law Officer of the Crown who fulfils the duties of the Solicitor-General is not a Member of Parliament. That underlines the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr made earlier about better practice in Scotland, which may be something to do with its Presbyterian heritage. Nobody could deny that the anomaly exists.

In the debate in 1983, Mark Carlisle—then the right hon. Member for Runcorn, now Lord Carlisle of Bucklow—made a distinguished speech, but the only argument that he advanced in favour of the status quo was

that it was important to maintain a link between those who make the law, especially on police and criminal matters, and those who dispense it in a judicial capacity. Others have argued that it is important for those with judicial experience to bring their knowledge of the realities of the law to the House, but that does not mean that anyone has to fulfil both roles simultaneously. Hon. Members meet people from chambers of commerce, industrialists, transport workers and borough councillors, who tell us of the impact of our work on them and what they require from the legislature. The special pleading for those who act as recorders is not so strong, therefore, as it sounds on first hearing. There are many opportunities for people acquainted with judicial matters to bring their experience to bear here and in another place.

So the argument in favour of that arrangement is for the future. This is more of a discussion than a definitive occasion. Even if by chance the idea were accepted tonight, I would not suggest that the three or four right hon. and hon. Members concerned should summarily be dismissed from those offices of profit. The matter is more for the future than for an immediate decision today.

However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr said, the further we go, the more necessary it is for anomalies to be cleared up and the documentation improved. Above all, hon. Members and those who pay attention to us should be assured that we not only exercise democracy but are seen to do so. So long as there is the anomaly of hon. Members with paid judicial functions elsewhere, that will not be so.

Perhaps the Government will give me an assurance in response to my final question. Some years ago, the anomaly was so great that a Member was appointed recorder of a town in the area that he represented. Such a thing would not be tolerated today, but it happened then. I understand that the office is no longer a local government function, as it was historically, but became an office of profit under the Crown in the 1970s.

I hope that the Minister will assure us that if further appointments are made before any change in the law, despite the fact that arrangements are now made on an area basis, people will not be able to sit anywhere near the area that they represent, or an area with which they have close connections of any sort. Conflict of interests would thereby be avoided.

That hope and that suggestion fall somewhat short of my amendment. I moved the amendment, but I do not wish to press it heavily, other than for the purposes of discussion. I hope that the Minister will respond as constructively and thoughtfully as my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr did in his interesting speech.

5.41 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): It seems to me that whether the measure should be implemented by order is not the most important issue. The most important issue is whether the ideas in the motion have been properly canvassed. I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), and it was clear that he had not had the opportunity to understand the full extent of the proposed amendments. If he has not had that opportunity, and other hon. Members have not been given reasonable time, the people most affected have certainly not been given notice.

I am thinking primarily of the people who diligently serve, basically as volunteers, on industrial tribunals. I shall talk about them later. It seems mean-spirited, if not rather sloppy of the Minister not to allow an adequate consultation period before bringing the matter before the House. He can screw up his face as much as he likes, but he has not done that, and he is a sloppy Minister. That fact needs to be put on the record. *[Interruption.]* I shall come to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) in a moment. If my adrenaline really starts to flow, when I start asking questions about people having other jobs besides being Members of Parliament—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I caution the hon. Gentleman against straying out of order by going far beyond what is before us tonight.

Mr. Mackinlay: Indeed, I am very mindful of that warning, as always, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Once I realised that the subject would be debated today, I obtained the so-called explanatory note, but it is not very good. It consists of a list rather than an explanation. Consequently I tabled some parliamentary questions as soon as I could. I have just slipped out of the Chamber to see if any answers have arrived, but none has.

That is why I ask the Minister whether, if with the leave of the House he replies to the debate, he will explain the alterations affecting the position of lieutenants and lord-lieutenants of the islands in Scotland. Perhaps the changes are a consequence of local government reorganisation.

If the Minister had not been so dilatory and sloppy he could have included that in his explanatory note, or at least ensured that I received a reply before we embarked on the debate. If he were at school he would be given only four out of 10, at the most, for his stewardship of what should be a relatively easy matter to bring before the House.

I asked the Minister for an explanation because I wondered whether the Conservatives had selected a candidate who is a lord-lieutenant for an islands area. Perhaps that is why they had to make the exclusion. I do not know, but I am a pretty suspicious fellow when I think of some of the perverse offices whose holders are allowed to be Members of the House, compared with some of the offices that prevent their holders from becoming Members. Perhaps there was a political intention behind the change. No doubt we shall hear from the Minister soon.

Mr. Rooker: I do not want to spoil a good speech, but, as I understand it, the alteration simply takes account of the fact that the word "region" is being changed to the word "area". So far as I know, it is a consequential change in the drafting.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but he has to be patient for only a few more weeks. He will soon be the Minister. I am criticising the existing Minister for not having regard to what I think is my entitlement as an hon. Member—a full and adequate explanation in the documentation. When that does not exist, and I table a question, surely courtesy dictates that the Minister should have ensured that I had a reply before we embarked on the discussion.

I know that things will be better in about six weeks' time, because my hon. Friend will be the Minister handling the matter. His undertaking to try to secure

[Mr. Mackinlay]

parliamentary time for a root-and-branch review of the legislation is welcome. I look forward to that. Perhaps, contrary to his better judgment, my hon. Friend may even allow me to serve on the Committee on the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must deal with what is happening now.

Mr. Mackinlay: Reference has been made to hon. Members who serve on industrial tribunals. The change is being brought before the House a few weeks before a general election, and it is reasonable to suspect that, at a time when they were not disbarred, some people serving on industrial tribunals will have been selected by political parties as their candidates.

From this afternoon those people will be disbarred. One assumes that that information will filter down to them through the political parties, and they will have a choice of either surrendering their prospective candidacy or resigning from the industrial tribunal before nomination day.

As I said in my intervention, that is tremendously unfair. Unless the present Minister can give an undertaking today, it is unlikely that, having resigned from the tribunals, people who fail to be elected shall then be reinstated almost automatically, on a fresh application.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It may be helpful to recall that in 1984-85, for reasons that I shall not go into, a number of people resigned from industrial tribunals. As the assistant Minister at the Department of Employment, I managed not to accept their resignations, and later most of those resignations were withdrawn. I do not suggest that we should do anything underhand, but if the proposal before the House causes a problem, the Minister may want to consult and find out whether what happened then establishes a precedent. If so, members of industrial tribunals who stand for election can openly say that they have submitted their resignations, but if they are not elected the resignations will not be accepted, and will in effect be dropped.

Mr. Mackinlay: That is a good idea. It demonstrates the fact that if there had been consultation, such ideas could have been bounced off the Minister informally. He might then have decided not to include members of industrial tribunals on the list in the first place—partly because it was a perverse daft idea anyway. We have heard no persuasive explanation for their inclusion. That was demonstrated by my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr, and there is no logical reason for it.

Mr. Bottomley: An alternative would be for my hon. Friend to indicate whether a manuscript amendment could be submitted which would leave the members of industrial tribunals in the position after the passing of the legislation that they were in before—that is to say, they are not included. Were the Chair willing to accept such a late manuscript amendment to that effect, there would be no change from the present position. This might be important, because clearly members of industrial tribunals make up the majority of those who might be affected and they may not know that they will be affected.

Mr. Mackinlay: I wait with bated breath to hear the reason why they have been included on the list, and we will see why later on.

Mr. Spearing: This procedure illustrates that Parliament—in what is almost a Committee-style debate—can not only find problems but, as the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) has just done, provide answers. It has just occurred to me that if there is to be a great exit from the Tory Benches, or a risk that some Tory Members may be looking for these jobs, those who are not on the Government Front Bench might be advantaged by the anomaly that I pointed out.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I now wish to refer to the amendment. As a matter of principle, serving members of the judiciary should not be Members of this House, as there is a conflict. That is not to say that hon. Members who hold those offices are anything other than diligent Members and skilled practitioners of law. That is not at issue. But it is a matter of constitutional propriety. It is wrong for people who are law makers in their judicial capacity—their judgments can become precedents and the law of the land—also to be Members of Parliament. To have that dual role is unhealthy in a democracy.

My second point on that is that we are talking about a paid office of profit. I am of the view that hon. Members should not have substantial paid outside employment but, alas, that matter is not at issue this afternoon. It is wrong that the state should pay people for substantial outside employment while they are also Members of this House, and the office of recorder is one such post. That is simply wrong. It is a matter of debate whether or not people should have outside interests, and they can defend their position. But the Crown should not be encouraging that in a modern democracy, as most hon. Members find that serving this House is a major preoccupation, seven days a week throughout the year. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr is the Minister he will bring forward legislation to deal with that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr said that there are problems in legislating for Members of this House to be full time. In many modern Parliaments—including one with which I am particularly familiar, Poland—Members can have outside interests as academics, lawyers or architects, but they do not take a full salary. The system is transparent, and people understand it. Many constituents are not aware that hon. Members are serving as recorders or have other outside interests. We will return to this debate after the election.

My hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr mentioned the question of Roman Catholic priests. I go along with him that there is an anomaly, but it seems to me that the anomaly is that priests of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England cannot be elected to this House.

Mr. Rooker: No.

Mr. Mackinlay: My hon. Friend answers from a sedentary position, but in my view there is no logical

reason why serving Anglican ministers or Roman Catholic priests—although their Churches might not approve—cannot be candidates or serve in this House. They should be entitled to stand, although whether it is prudent for them to do so or is acceptable to their Church is a matter for them and their Church authorities. But there should be a presumption in a democracy that people can stand for the legislature, or there must be extraordinarily good reasons to exclude them.

I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr said. It would have been ridiculous that had Bruce Kent been elected, he would have been prevented from serving as an hon. Member. There was no way in which he could have shed the fact that he had been ordained as a Roman Catholic priest. He would have been in a similar position to that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) before the passing of the Peerage Act 1963, in that there was no way in which he could get rid of his disqualification.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr that this is a ridiculous situation, but surely the answer is that priests—whether they are members of the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church—should not be prevented from serving in the House. Episcopalian ministers from Scotland and Wales can be elected, and we know that ministers from other religions serve in this House. I hope that that will be looked at in the not too distant future.

I failed to persuade the Chair about the merits of my amendment, and I will not trespass into its provisions. But it puts down a benchmark for the next Labour Government, who must look at whether or not people can serve in this House and have substantial paid outside employment. I think that that is wrong in a modern democracy, and countries such as the United States have strict rules and limitations about outside employment from which we should borrow. We must make membership of this House more modern, and we should not disqualify very good servants who serve, for instance, on industrial tribunals.

5.55 pm

Mr. Bates: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the speeches that have been made, which—by and large—were of a quality that will help the debate. When we looked at the Act and the amendments to it, we were aware that this was an on-going process. This is not a complete document by any means, and we are not seeking this evening to achieve perfect legislation.

The Act that we are amending now was passed in 1975 by a Government of a different colour. It is not perfect in every form, but the general principles are that we should try to maintain high standards and, wherever possible, avoid apparent conflicts of interest. In the time available to me, I shall try to respond to some of the serious points that have been made.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The House will be grateful for the attitude that my hon. Friend has shown at the beginning of his reply. In terms of the major parties—Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat—how many adopted prospective candidates are members of industrial tribunals?

Mr. Bates: I am afraid that I do not know the answer to that. It is difficult to quantify, and only when the general election is called will the true nature of the answer be seen.

An important element of this is that the addition of the tribunals' lay members does not mean a change in policy. In 1975, the members of the employment appeal tribunal were disqualified. On taking up their posts, lay members of the tribunal signed an instrument of appointment which set out that they were prepared to resign their membership on adoption as prospective parliamentary candidates. That position is clear. Far from a conspiracy theory about trying to block certain people from entering the House, we were making a genuine effort to try to clear up a matter that could have been misinterpreted. Some may have thought that only the full-time personnel on the employment appeal tribunal would be disqualified, whereas it applied to all members. They should know that, because it was on the instrument of appointment that they signed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) made a sensible point when he talked about a similar case that had arisen when he was in office. We are talking about guidelines and, should it transpire after a general election that a candidate was elected who was disqualified under the Act, I am sure that the House would look carefully and sympathetically at the case.

Mr. Bottomley: Is my hon. Friend saying that if I was appointed as a member of an employment appeal tribunal, I would sign a document to the effect that if I was adopted as a prospective parliamentary candidate I would stand down from the EAT, or that those who are appointed to industrial tribunals make that commitment? Would there be a significant harmful effect if the manuscript amendment to leave out lines 90 to 93 and lines 168 to 169 were accepted, so that we do not make the proposed change in this trawl but can come back to it on another occasion?

Mr. Bates: I am talking about industrial tribunals as well as the employment tribunal; I should have made that clearer. On the generous offer of a manuscript amendment, the matter can be reviewed. It has been reviewed 10 times already; indeed, it is under permanent review. The last review was in 1993, and there is no reason why the point could not be considered again if it was deemed to be worth while. We drew on representations, many of which were made during the debate in 1993.

Mr. Spearing: I understand the Minister's reluctance to accept even the suggestion of a manuscript amendment at this hour, but does he agree that another suggestion that might be taken up by readers of this debate is that, if a resignation was tendered, those who had to accept it and

[Mr. Spearing]

confirm the receipt of it might delay that acceptance or reply until after a certain date? That would at least get rid of the anomaly for the three months coming up.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Minister continues, let me make it crystal clear that it rests with me whether a manuscript amendment is accepted. None will be accepted.

Mr. Bates: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. That stops that line of inquiry in its tracks.

Mr. Spearing: No, it is irrelevant to my point.

Mr. Bates: I listened to the hon. Gentleman and I shall certainly reflect on what he said.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) for the fact that the rather lengthy list was put late into the Vote Office, if it was the case that in previous years the Opposition had longer to study it. We put it there a week ago, but we shall try in future to allow more time for hon. Members to consider our proposed additions. When the amendments that the Government have proposed are made, a reprint will be issued of the 1975 Act shortly afterwards, including a full list of all the positions at issue.

The hon. Member for Perry Barr made some passionate remarks relating to the clergy which were strongly endorsed by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham. It is important to recognise that a member of the clergy in the Church of England can resign his position by means of the Clerical Disabilities Act 1870 and take his seat in the House. There is no similar Act for Roman Catholic priests. Perhaps there should be: that must be considered on another occasion.

I want to take up the interesting point about the leader of the Referendum party and his position should he seek election to the House. The Council Act of 20 September 1976 establishes the rules for direct elections to the European Parliament, so changes to that Act are outside the scope of the motion. The rules do not debar members of national legislatures from membership of the European Parliament.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) made some interesting comments, some of which I do not agree with. He has a habit of looking for the conspiracy in everything: if the answers to questions are late, it must mean that the Government have something to hide, rather than a little bit of slowness in the courier service—which is in fact the only reason.

As the hon. Member for Perry Barr said, this is a deregulatory measure. Where the Act refers to areas, rather than island areas and regions, those are different entries. We have sought to combine them, and that is the reason for the changes.

The hon. Member for Thurrock made some disparaging remarks about my office, which I am sure that, on reflection, he will want to withdraw.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Bates: Let me just finish what I am saying, because I have some better remarks to come. The hon. Gentleman made some disparaging remarks, and should he be thinking about intervening, I should mention that I have to hand the Register of Members' Interests, open at his entry.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. My disparaging remarks related to him, not to his office. The point is that the "explanatory note" contained no explanations, and there had clearly been no consultation. That is why I say that the Minister's stewardship was not right. I do not see a conspiracy, but I believe that there should be proper transparency in the House. As happens so often, measures are being bounced through.

Mr. Bates: Well, seven days is a long bounce, as they say, just as a week is a long time in politics.

An important point was raised about recorders. It has long been recognised that the full-time judiciary must be disbarred from membership of the legislature, and part I of schedule 1 achieves that. It has also been long recognised that it is not only compatible with being a Member of Parliament to practise a profession, but can be a positive advantage, both to the individual Member and to the House as a whole. Several hon. Members are lay justices, and I am not aware of anyone raising any objection to that.

The position of recorders is somewhat different, in that they are paid for each sitting day; it would be a poor judicial system that did not pay them for the valuable work that they do, which is, after all, a public service. Often those people are in chambers and could therefore be earning substantially more than they are given for their daily sitting as a recorder.

Of course, those recorders do not sit within the boundaries of their constituency. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) represents a seat in Leicestershire.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Staffordshire.

Mr. Bates: He represents a seat in Staffordshire, but sits as a recorder in London. I understand that three Members are serving recorders. Their practical knowledge of the administration of justice has brought valuable experience to the House. Members who are recorders or assistant recorders do not, by custom, sit as recorders in their constituencies. Supporters of the amendment have not succeeded in persuading me that that long-established custom should be changed. I therefore advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the amendment. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: By leave of the House, I should like to speak again.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman cannot speak again.

Mr. Bottomley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have a difficulty over the industrial tribunal change. My hon. Friend the Minister confirmed in winding up that we are bringing something into statute which was not there before and argued that the House should accept that. He kindly acknowledged in his

winding-up speech, made by leave of the House, that neither he nor other hon. Members know how many people are affected. There is a significant point of order in that the House should not wantonly, recklessly or lightly disqualify from standing people who have been in all honour democratically selected by their parties. May I repeat my request to speak, by leave of the House, in response to the Minister? If I could, it would be useful to people who may be affected by what the House decides in the next 15 minutes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. I cannot adjudicate on such matters. It is my strict understanding that it is not possible to speak twice to the same Question except in very limited circumstances. I do not think that that applies to ordinary Back Benchers.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The House is obliged to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). He has spotlighted something that did not occur to us in the debate. We do not know how many people might be disbarred in the next few weeks by our decision tonight on candidatures for office. Would it be in order for the Minister not to move the motion, or for it to be negatived? When the Government find out whether anyone will be affected—and the effects could be serious—they could bring back the substantive motion, which could go through the House quickly, perhaps even on the nod. It is, of course, a matter for the Minister to decide whether he should pursue that course of action. If he does not pursue it, and there is difficulty, it may be said that it could have been avoided if he had listened to the debate and to the hon. Member for Eltham.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is not for the Chair to second-guess a Minister on whether he wishes to withdraw a motion. That must be a matter for him. Normally, if one does not like something, one votes against it.

Mr. Bottomley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would be most grateful if you could guide me to the reference in "Erskine May" that distinguishes between Back Benchers and Front Benchers speaking by leave of the House. This is my only chance to respond to the Minister's remarks about the debate. For me to block the motion because I was unable to make some concluding remarks would be a rather heavy weapon to use, but, as you said, that is an option open to hon. Members.

The sense of the debate was that the Government should get their change to the law. However, we now know not only that it is possible that people have stood for selection, and perhaps been chosen, but that it is conceivable that they might have put themselves or their parties to inescapable expenses, not knowing that the House would make a retrospective change. The easiest way forward might be if I were to conclude my point of order, listen to your ruling and ask whether by leave of the House, I might make some concluding remarks that could tidy the issue up to the satisfaction of the House. If any hon. Member said no, I would not pursue it. If I could speak, it may help those outside the House who want to join us after the general election.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The general rule is that a Member may not speak twice to the same Question. There is a different arrangement in respect of the right of reply of Members who have moved substantive motions. I am satisfied that I am right in not allowing the hon. Gentleman to make a further contribution. He has made his various points.

Mr. Bottomley: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I asked whether there was a reference in "Erskine May" to Back Benchers not being able to ask the leave of the House to speak again.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already said what I believe the position to be. I am sure that "Erskine May" references can be found, but I cannot produce them now. I am satisfied that I was correct on my last point.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order for the Minister, if he so wishes, to take my suggestion before you put the Question on my amendment?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sorry, but I did quite not catch that.

Mr. Spearing: Would it be in order for the Minister to pursue my suggestion, which I hope was constructive, to avoid any problems with candidates in the next three weeks, before you put the Question on the amendment, which I believe is the next formal Question to be put by the Chair? So far, the Minister has shown no sign of so doing, but I hope that he would use it as an insurance policy so that the House will not be blamed for any consequences. We do not know the facts.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I cannot rule from the Chair on what a Minister wishes to do. No doubt he will make his decision plain and the hon. Gentleman will be able to decide his course of action.

Mr. Rooker: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that you understood that the Minister said that the resolution formalises the status quo? Perhaps the Minister could confirm that passing this measure does not change anything. However, for the better information of those who may be affected in the next couple of weeks, perhaps all 2,700 of them could have the issue drawn to their attention as a matter of urgency so that they would know exactly where they stand.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Bates: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This bout of points of order may be due to the fact that we have not made absolutely clear the position on people who may seek election to the House. With your permission, I hope to make it clear. Their instruments of appointment to their present positions would require them to resign forthwith on becoming prospective parliamentary candidates. I hope that that is clear for the record.

Mr. Bottomley: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The House has not been told when that was brought in. I was not aware of it when I used to make appointments

Mr. Rooker *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Bottomley: If, as a Minister, I was not aware of it, I am not sure that all those who were appointed were

[Mr. Bottomley]

aware of it. The situation is unsatisfactory. I support the suggestion that if people put in prospective letters of resignation, Departments should not be too speedy in acting on them.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member knows that that is not a point of order and we cannot pursue it further.

Has the Minister concluded his remarks?

Mr. Bates: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Amendment negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That Schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 be amended as follows:—

PART I OF SCHEDULE 1

Amendment

1. For the entry 'Judge of the Court of Session' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Judge of the Court of Session, or Temporary Judge appointed under the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990.

PART II OF SCHEDULE 1

Additional entries

2. The following entries shall be inserted at the appropriate places:—

The Antarctic Act Tribunal established under regulations made under the Antarctic Act 1994.

The East of Scotland Water Authority.

The Land Authority for Wales.

The Local Government Staff Commission (England).

The North of Scotland Water Authority.

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.

The Scottish Legal Aid Board.

The Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council or any committee established by that council under paragraph 10(1) of Schedule 9 to the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

The Training and Employment Agency Advisory Board in Northern Ireland.

The West of Scotland Water Authority.

Entry omitted

3. The following entry shall be omitted:—

The Scottish Development Agency.

PART III OF SCHEDULE 1

Additional entries

4. The following entries shall be inserted at the appropriate places:—

Adjudicator appointed under section 5 of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1995.

Adjudicator for the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Contributions Agency.

Assessor appointed for the purposes of section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Chairman of an Agricultural Land Tribunal or member of a panel appointed under paragraph 14 or 15 of Schedule 9 to the Agriculture Act 1947.

Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

Chairman or Chief Executive of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils.

Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the English Sports Council.

Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the Financial Reporting Council.

Chairman or any director of the Further Education Development Agency.

Chairman of Investors in People UK.

Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive of the Medical Research Council.

Chairman or Director of the National Forest Company.

Chairman of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

Chairman of the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Chairman, Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive of the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council.

Chairman of the Rural Development Council for Northern Ireland.

Chairman or any member, not also being an employee, of the State Hospitals Board for Scotland.

Chairman of the United Kingdom Sports Council.

Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.

Civil Service Commissioner.

Civil Service Commissioner for Northern Ireland.

Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.

Any director of Horticulture Research International in receipt of remuneration.

Director General of Gas for Northern Ireland.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland.

Member of the staff of the Forestry Commissioners.

Member of the legal panel of persons available to act as chairmen of Registered Homes Tribunals.

Member of the legal panel of persons available to act as chairmen of Registered Homes Tribunals in Northern Ireland.

Any member of the property commission established by virtue of section 19 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

Any member of a residuary body established by virtue of section 18 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994 who is in receipt of remuneration.

Any member of the staff commission established by virtue of section 12 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

President of the Industrial Tribunals (England and Wales), President of the Industrial Tribunals (Scotland) or member of a panel of persons appointed to act as chairmen or other members of industrial tribunals.

President of the Special Educational Needs Tribunal, or member of a panel of persons appointed to act as chairmen or other members of that tribunal.

Entries omitted

5. The following entries shall be omitted:—

Chairman, or Director General and Deputy Chairman, of the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Chairman or member of a panel of deputy-chairmen of an Agricultural Land Tribunal.

Chairman of the Business & Technology Council.

Paid Chairman of the Central Transport Consultative Committee for Great Britain established under section 56 of the Transport Act 1962.

Chairman of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Chairman of the Land Authority for Wales.

Chairman of the Letchworth Garden City Corporation.

Chairman of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council.

Any Chairman of the Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal.

Chairman of the Science and Engineering Research Council.

Chairman of the Scottish Legal Aid Board.

Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Sports Council.

Chairman of the Training and Employment Agency Advisory Board in Northern Ireland.

Delegate for Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to the Central Rhine Commission.

Director of British Telecommunications p.l.c. nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or government department.

Director of Northern Ireland Airports Limited.

Director of the successor company (within the meaning of the British Steel Act 1988) being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

Director of the successor company (within the meaning of the British Technology Group Act 1991) being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

Director of a successor company (within the meaning of Part II of the Electricity Act 1989), being a director nominated or appointed by a Minister of the Crown or by a person acting on behalf of the Crown.

Any member of the Insolvency Practitioners Tribunal in receipt of remuneration.

Member of a Wages Council appointed under paragraph 1(b) of Schedule 2 to the Wages (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.

President, or member of a panel of chairmen, of industrial tribunals established under section 12 of the Industrial Training Act 1964.

Secretary of the Medical Research Council.

Other amendments

6.—(1) In the entry 'Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards', for 'Vice-Chairman' there shall be substituted 'Medical Director'.

(2) In the entry 'Chairman of the Economic and Social Research Council', after 'Chairman' there shall be inserted 'Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive'.

(3) In the entry 'Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland', the words 'or Deputy Chairman' shall be omitted.

(4) In the entry 'Chairman of the Livestock Marketing Commission for Northern Ireland', for 'Marketing' there shall be substituted 'and Meat'.

(5) In the entry 'Chairman of any of the National Boards for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting constituted under section 5 of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979', there shall be inserted at the end 'or any member of any of those Boards appointed at a salary'.

(6) In the entry 'Chairman or non-executive member of a National Health Service trust established under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 or the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978', for 'non-executive member' there shall be substituted 'non-executive director'.

(7) In the entry 'Chairman of the Natural Environment Research Council', after 'Chairman' there shall be inserted 'Deputy Chairman or Chief Executive'.

(8) For the entry 'Member of a panel of chairmen of industrial tribunals established under Article 30 of the Industrial Training (Northern Ireland) Order 1984' there shall be substituted the following entry:—

Member of a panel of persons appointed to act as chairmen or other members of industrial tribunals in Northern Ireland.

(9) In the entry 'Rent officer or deputy rent officer appointed in pursuance of a scheme under section 63 of the Rent Act 1977', the words 'or deputy rent officer' shall be omitted.

PART IV OF SCHEDULE 1

Entry omitted

7. The entry relating to Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant or Lieutenant for an islands area in Scotland shall be omitted.

Other amendments

8.—(1) In the entry relating to Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant or Lieutenant for a region in Scotland—

(a) for 'a region' there shall be substituted 'an area'; and

(b) for the words from 'such part' to 'Majesty' there shall be substituted 'the area'.

(2) In the entry relating to Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant or Lieutenant for the district of the city of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh or Glasgow—

(a) the words 'the district of' shall be omitted; and

(b) for 'the district in' there shall be substituted 'the city in'.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

MERCHANT SHIPPING

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Ro-Ro Passenger Ship Survivability) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 23rd January, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With permission, I shall put together motions 4 to 7.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14A(1) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

That the draft Deregulation (Employment in Bars) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 16th December, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Casinos) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 20th January, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Validity of Civil Preliminaries to Marriage) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 20th January, be approved.

That the draft Deregulation (Gaming on Sunday in Scotland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 20th January, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Welwyn Hatfield Council (Slough Estates)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

6.19 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to bring this issue to the Floor of the House. It is crucial to the financial well-being of all my constituents. To paint the picture, I should like to start with Labour-controlled Welwyn Hatfield council's agreement with two property companies—Slough Estates and the Carroll group. In the late 1980s, putting it simply, Slough Estates was to build a shopping centre in Welwyn Garden City, without any restriction on the type of shops, but was nervous, to say the least, that its investment would be undermined if the Park Plaza scheme, hereafter referred to as The Galleria, did not have a strict tenants mix agreement as to the type of shops.

The council agreed to Slough's request, so the company proceeded to develop the site, and an impressive shopping complex it is, too. The Carroll group pressed for the relaxation of the tenants mix agreement. In an aide-memoire prepared for the Labour council working party, Martin Hayes, the then chief finance officer, said:

"In view of the very recent approval to the Howard centre and the sensitivity that those developers have always shown to the Park Plaza scheme, the decision to relax the tenants mix agreement in the way suggested cannot be minuted at this stage. Nevertheless, such a decision would have to be acted on behind the scenes."

So there we have it. I repeat what Mr. Hayes said:

"In view of the very recent approval to the Howard centre and the sensitivity that those developers have always shown to the Park Plaza scheme, the decision to relax the tenants mix agreement in the way suggested cannot be minuted at this stage. Nevertheless, such a decision would have to be acted on behind the scenes."

The A1(M) working party, which has a Labour majority and includes six Labour members, accepted that decision and the full council endorsed it, although not all councillors were informed of the policy change. In the recent ruling against the council following the change in 1987, the judge said:

"Thereafter, after 1987 there was a policy of lies."

So there we have it again. If I may, I shall repeat what the judge said:

"Thereafter, after 1987 there was a policy of lies."

The leader of the council was Stan Atkinson, a Labour councillor. The deputy leader at that time was Councillor Ray Little, who stood in 1992 as my Labour opponent at the general election and subsequently became leader of the council. Councillor Chris Gillen was chairman of the 1987 A1(M) working party. The judge said:

"They acted as a nucleus who steered the rest."

They are, to their eternal shame, still councillors and have not done what any honourable person should do in these circumstances—resign.

If that was not bad enough, more scandal was to follow. The new Labour leader of the council in 1996, Mr. Ray Little, was offered, three days before going to court, an out-of-court settlement of £16 million by Slough Estates. Without any consultation with the council officers or Labour colleagues, Mr. Little refused on behalf of all the

people of Welwyn Hatfield. He should be locked up and the keys thrown away. He single-handedly robbed the people of Welwyn Hatfield—my constituents—of £32 million. What is more, he could not care less.

Can my hon. Friend the Minister please say whether any application was made to the Department of the Environment for permission to use the council's capital receipts to settle the Slough Estates debt when the offer was made and we had the chance to settle the case for just £16 million, before it went to court? If so, was permission refused by the Government?

As a result of that Stalinist slap in the face, Slough Estates took the Labour council to court and won a judgment of £48 million, which has now increased to £53 million with the addition of costs and interest accruing. I repeat the figures in case the House did not hear me. The £48 million has now increased to £53 million. The Labour council decided to appeal, but then withdrew the appeal on legal advice. It is now trying to find the money to pay the debt.

This fiasco should make people think about the consequences of voting Labour, not only in Welwyn Hatfield but across the nation. Where Labour is in control, we have financial incompetence, lies and bankruptcy.

How can we settle this appalling state of affairs? If we wait for my Labour opponent in the forthcoming general election to speak on the subject, we shall wait for ever. Her silence has been deafening, but then she lives in Cambridge. The people of Welwyn Hatfield tell me that she is not interested, because it is not her problem, but for people who live in the constituency, it certainly is.

I want my hon. Friend the Minister to watch my lips. Is he looking? However this debt is to be paid, which it will have to be, David Evans will not allow it to be paid by a surcharge on every household in Welwyn Hatfield, with a council tax bill of at least £1,500. I will say it again, just to make sure that my hon. Friend has heard me. However this debt is to be paid, which it will have to be, David Evans will not allow it to be paid by the people of Welwyn Hatfield through a surcharge on every household, with a council tax bill of at least £1,500.

After the payment of £10 million from reserves, the amount owing is now about £43 million. That is increasing by a staggering £7,000 a day in bank interest. The council has £15 million on deposit from council house sales, which is earning interest at about £900,000 per year. It would like to pay that amount to Slough Estates, thereby reducing the debt to £28 million, with the balance to be paid with the receipts from large-scale transfer of housing stock. I have supported that approach fiercely in the past.

As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, I have been in constant contact in person, by telephone and by letter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, I am well aware that there are one or two stumbling blocks that might be difficult to surmount in order to bring the current difficulties of Welwyn Hatfield to a quick conclusion. I emphasise that those stumbling blocks have been created not by the Government, but by the attitude of the Labour-controlled Welwyn Hatfield council.

The first problem seems to me to be how the council would make up the loss of £900,000 interest accruing on £15 million on deposit, which goes directly into income available for expenditure by the council. One presumes that the shortfall would be added to the council tax bills. If that is the Labour council's intention, I say no way.

Does my hon. Friend the Minister believe that the council, having reduced the debt to £28 million, has the incentive to embark seriously on the transfer of housing stock when, over many years, it has dragged its feet on embracing Government policy? That policy would allow my constituents to buy their own homes or agree to have them run by a housing association, which has the interests of tenants at heart.

Even as recently as last month, the Labour group leader said on the front page of *Welwyn Hatfield Times* that she believed that Labour councillors would refuse to sanction the transfer of housing stock to meet the judgment against the council in the Slough Estates fraud.

In the past couple of weeks, however, the council seems to have had a change of heart. I wonder why. Unfortunately for my constituents, not least those living in council-owned property, the damage has been done by Labour councillors and their cohorts on the council. Their statement in the local newspaper has sent a disgraceful message to tenants, who, as we all know, have their own vote to decide whether a housing association should take over their properties. Labour councillors have effectively said, "Don't vote for the transfer of your home to housing associations." We all know, however, that if they did that under that Labour-controlled council, they certainly would not be any worse off than they are now.

Perhaps the Minister would like to take this opportunity to tell my constituents about the virtues of transferring housing stock to a housing association and the benefits that tenants would enjoy. In my opinion, with its message to tenants, the Labour council is once again trying to obstruct Government policy that would help the people of Welwyn Hatfield and improve the quality of life for tenants, but as we all know, that council says one thing and does another.

Perhaps the Minister can also confirm that whatever is the outstanding debt, 100 per cent. of receipts from the transfer of housing stock to housing associations will be available for use to pay off the debt and not just 25 per cent., according to the current rules.

I expect the Government to tell us tonight what the next step is. The people of Welwyn Hatfield deserve our support. They have been let down by the Labour councillors whom they elected in good faith, year in and year out, over the past 20 years. They are fortunate that we have a Conservative Government to try to protect them—a Government who have also ensured that their council tax is capped. They have a Conservative Member of Parliament who champions their cause without fear or favour.

Finally, may I say that this Member will not allow the Government, civil servants, councillors or officers simply to wash their hands of this nightmare in the hope that it will go away? It must be resolved in the best interests of my constituents, and those who are responsible for the lies, fraud and deceit must be brought to book. They must be made responsible for the debt and they must be disqualified from ever standing as councillors again. In that way, those incompetent, inadequate financial pygmies will never ever be allowed to rob the people of Welwyn Hatfield again.

6.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): It is always a pleasure to listen to my hon. Friend the Member for

[Sir Paul Beresford]

Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). I can advise him that there is no need to watch his lips—we can hear him quite emphatically and clearly.

My hon. Friend repeated the key points of an unpleasant story, the facts of which are well known, and so they should be. It is a private and local grief, and a tragedy for the local people—the tenants and the residents who will have to pay if the council has its way—whom my hon. Friend has championed.

We know that it is a difficult situation. The story is well known and has been clearly related by my hon. Friend. In essence, in 1987, the council took certain planning decisions relating to a retail development in its local authority area. Slough Estates plc, the owners of the Howard centre, a nearby shopping development, considered that it had not been treated fairly and challenged the council's decisions.

Recently—for the benefit of my hon. Friend, I should like to repeat that it was very recently—we heard that, last year, the council was offered an out-of-court settlement of £16 million. We were not aware of that at the time. No application for assistance in regard to the offer was received by my Department, so no decision could be made on a request that was not asked.

The case went to court. Slough Estates successfully sued the council and damages were awarded to the company amounting to £49 million. As my hon. Friend pointed out, those damages were exacerbated by certain actions.

In January, the council applied to my Department for a supplementary credit approval, to release £15 million of invested capital receipts. Under the capital finance system, that money can be used only with a credit approval. We have a firm policy of not issuing SCAs outside certain specific, targeted programmes—for instance, for reorganisation costs. Outside those programmes, SCAs can be given only in the most exceptional circumstances.

We considered Welwyn Hatfield's case extremely carefully, but we concluded that there was insufficient justification for issuing an SCA. Consequently, we turned down its application. Such an approval would lead to an increase in the public sector borrowing requirement. In order to meet our objectives for the public finances, that would have to be balanced by increases in Government revenues from taxation.

My Department gets a number of requests for SCAs each year from authorities facing unplanned demands on their budgets. If we gave way in the case of Welwyn Hatfield, we would be expected to do so in other cases. There would be substantial public expenditure consequences if we met even a proportion of the applications.

My hon. Friend has, however, offered an eminently sensible suggestion—large-scale voluntary transfer of the housing stock. It is a well-proven scheme, which works extremely well and is extremely successful and popular. LSVT increases investment and improves the condition of the existing stock in every case. Housing transfers are not rare, although Welwyn Hatfield council might say that they are, nor are they exotic or an emergency measure. They are becoming a normal, common, well-recognised way of meeting requirements in housing for tenants, with tenants' consent. They are accepted by authorities and councils of all political complexions.

Housing transfer is not just a solution for now, but provides long-term benefits for the future. Public expenditure will always be limited. Housing authorities will never be able to spend as much as they might like in repairing and improving their stock. Private finance is not subject to the constraints of public expenditure. LSVT provides a stable financial future for the upkeep of tenants' homes.

Under the new Housing Act 1996, a local housing company can be set up as the new social landlord to own the stock, in which both local authority and tenants can hold substantial stakes.

Since 1988, 53 local authorities have transferred their stock, generating more than £3.7 billion in private finance. To borrow a saying, "Watch my lips: more than £3.7 billion in private finance." Receipts generated from transfers under the 1997 LSVT programme are expected to be around £350 million, involving 17 local authorities.

Last autumn, we introduced measures that included a three-year holiday from the 20 per cent. LSVT levy that is normally charged on transfers. Welwyn Hatfield is debt free. It no longer has to set aside any of the proceeds from future sales of assets. It would, therefore, have available 100 per cent. of the receipts from the transfer, including the extra 20 per cent., if it transferred within the holiday. The council would not need to touch its invested capital receipts and it would continue to receive the interest on those investments and on anything left from the transfer receipts.

We have increased the size limit for transfers to any one landlord from 5,000 to 12,000. Those such as Welwyn Hatfield with a stock below 12,000 would, if they so wished, be able to negotiate a transfer in one single action, thus saving on administrative costs and keeping the tenants together under one landlord. Tenants like LSVTs because of the benefits that they bring: for example, an accelerated programme of catch-up repairs; guaranteed rent levels for up to five years; much better management—in this case, much, much better management; and closer and real tenant involvement in management.

For the obvious reasons cited by my hon. Friend, transfer would be a sensible policy for Welwyn Hatfield. In fact, it would be sensible irrespective of the court case, in the present circumstances, because transfer brings private investment to the stock and generates resources for the council, which it could use for the benefit of its tenants and the local citizenry.

Labour Welwyn Hatfield has got itself into a corner and that is its own fault. The council now has a way out, which has been suggested by my hon. Friend. I congratulate him on championing the cause of his people, his residents, his citizens and his council tax payers. I only hope that, for a change, the councillors take the very broad hint that has been laid before them by their Member of Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty minutes to Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 14 February 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Jurisdiction (Conspiracy and Incitement) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

9.34 am

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I believe that the House is not quorate and seek your advice on how I might test that. This is a very important Bill, which changes the face of liberty in this country, and it would be entirely wrong for it to be slipped through in a thin House, simply because hardly anyone knows that we are discussing it. How might I move that the House is not quorate?

Madam Speaker: We do not need a quorum in the House. As for hon. Members and others not knowing today's business, I have to say that it was made known some time ago. I have been careful in selecting the amendments to ensure that we have an excellent debate. I am not prepared to go any further other than to say that the business of the House must now be proceeded with.

Mr. Galloway: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I have been advised that 40 hon. Members are required to be present to deal with this business, and that you count as four—I have no quarrel with that, except that it is an underestimation. It is my advice that we need 40 hon. Members to be present.

Madam Speaker: That is the case for Division purposes, but a quorum is not needed now.

Mr. Galloway: In those circumstances, I beg to move, That Strangers do withdraw.

Notice having been taken that Strangers were present, MADAM SPEAKER, *pursuant to Standing Order No. 143 (Withdrawal of Strangers from the House), put forthwith the Question,* That Strangers do withdraw:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

MR. RICHARD OTTAWAY *and* MR. ANTHONY COOMBS *were appointed Tellers for the Noes but only one Member being willing to act as Teller for the Ayes,* Madam Speaker *declared that the Noes had it.*

Clause 1

CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT OFFENCES OUTSIDE THE UNITED KINGDOM

9.39 am

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 25, at end insert—

'(4A) The fourth condition is that the offence referred to in subsection (4) would be triable on indictment and punishable by imprisonment.'.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 1, line 26, leave out 'fourth' and insert 'fifth'.

No. 3, in page 2, line 32, leave out 'fourth' and insert 'fifth'.

No. 7, in clause 2, page 3, line 13, after 'offence', insert

'which is triable on indictment and which is punishable by imprisonment'.

No. 10, in clause 3, page 4, line 11, after 'offence', insert

'which is triable on indictment and which is punishable by imprisonment'.

Mr. Michael: I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on his Bill reaching this stage. It is an ambitious Bill, which has, not surprisingly, received considerable drafting help from the Home Office and is, in essence, a Government Bill. The hon. Gentleman has not sought to abrogate responsibility for it, as he made clear in Committee, but it addresses wider issues than a private Member's Bill normally does. Scrutiny was rightly given on Second Reading and in Committee to the necessary balance.

The targets, as the hon. Member for Eastbourne has said—the Minister and I have repeated this—are the evils of terrorism, violence, racism and the conspiracy to commit crimes against civilised society. The problem with the Bill is also its strength—it is widely drawn to avoid spurious challenges on technical detail that might occur if it were drawn narrowly to cover a specific range of offences.

With the Bill having been drawn so widely to hit the intended targets, hon. Members on both sides have made it clear in the House and in Committee that we need reassurances that there will be a balance to avoid the powers given in the Bill being used for purposes beyond those intended by Parliament. I do not want to labour that point, because it was made well in Committee by many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). He wanted to be here this morning, but he has constituency commitments that he could not escape. I am sure that the Minister agrees that my hon. Friend made his points with reason and force in Committee. Conservative Members made the same points.

There is no disagreement on the fact that in certain circumstances, the powers in the Bill could be used in a way that the House did not intend. Examples of possible problems include Nelson Mandela's time in the United Kingdom, the activities of many people in this country who supported the Anti-Apartheid Movement and those of British Somalis whose relatives in the north of

[Mr. Michael]

Somalia—the former British Somaliland—were subjected to human rights abuses in a civil war conducted by the then President, Siad Barre. That was a hidden war for many in this country, long before the public conflict in Somalia. Hon. Members on both sides gave many other examples from around the world of cases in which the fine line between supporting those who want to bring democracy to their country and supporting those who promote violence and terrorism is difficult to draw in law.

As with many serious issues that we debate, it is often easy to recognise what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) once described as the elephant on the doorstep, but it is more difficult to define it. That is the type of issue that we are dealing with. The hon. Member for Eastbourne aims to prevent involvement in and promotion of terrorism, as well as trying to deal with those travelling to international football matches who are not really soccer fans, but a disgrace to the name. However, we must make sure that there is a mechanism to protect against the danger of the powers in the Bill being used for an unintended purpose. That is why, as in Committee, I have tabled amendments to provide a mechanism to ensure that the intentions of Parliament are protected.

9.45 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I think that the hon. Gentleman accepted in Committee that it is impossible to draw the line that he describes in the Bill, which is why he is looking for an extraneous mechanism—albeit specified in the Bill—to require consent in certain cases. I think that that is a fair summary of his position.

Mr. Michael: It is indeed. It would be too legalistic to try to draw a line, but it is sensible to have a provision built in. The protection offered by the powers of the Attorney-General and the clear understanding of his role—not his role as a member of the Government, but his other role of scrutinising prosecution—would give assurances to the House that the Bill will hit its intended target and will not go beyond that with a scatter of shot at all sorts of unintended targets.

The Minister undertook in Committee to consider what had been said. The debates on the Bill have shown the House of Commons at its best, on the Floor of the House and in Committee. I know that some people outside criticise us when we argue violently across the Chamber, but sniff out a conspiracy when we try to agree. Hon. Members on both sides have been united in supporting the purpose of the Bill and have also been united in trying to tease out a mechanism that would get the law in place, with the safeguard that I have described.

I do not seek to delay the House. Anybody who wants to see the arguments laid out can read the Committee *Hansard*. I appreciate that the Minister is not in the easiest situation, because it is only three days since the Committee debate. He has had only a short time to fulfil his promise to consider the arguments that were made there. The fact that the Government and the promoter of the Bill have not tabled amendments today shows that, 48 hours ago, the consideration that the Minister promised had not been completed. I hope that the Minister will be able to say something about that. I know that he and the promoter of the Bill are sympathetic to the strong point that I am making.

Length of contribution is not necessarily a sign of strength of argument. I would not help my argument by going on at length. I hope to hear sympathy for the need for a mechanism to avoid the misuse of the powers in the Bill and an undertaking that the Minister will consider the point further and will try to meet it when the Bill receives further consideration in another place. If that is his response, I shall not seek to prolong the debate or to push the amendments to a vote. I believe that we can make progress if the Minister considers the issues that he undertook to address.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): The hon. Gentleman will correct me if I am wrong, but is he talking about amendments that we have not reached?

Mr. Michael: The point is to find mechanisms. Amendment No. 1 is one of several. I am talking about them as a bundle rather than separating them, although we are debating them specifically. The aim of amendment No. 1 is to ensure that only acts

"triable on indictment and punishable by imprisonment"

would be caught by the Bill.

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Gentleman has spent a lot of time talking about issues that relate to a later group of amendments. I want to respond on behalf of the Government, but I hope that he will not object if, at this early stage, I do not respond on matters that are covered elsewhere.

Mr. Michael: If the Minister does not want to respond at an early stage, we shall have to consider matters later. I was trying to make progress.

As I said, there is a variety of ways, not all of which have been explored, in which we could ensure that the Bill is not used to hit the wrong targets and that it is used to hit the targets intended by the hon. Member for Eastbourne and by the Government. One possibility is for the Attorney-General to examine a variety of offences, including terrorism, that may be sensitive internationally. Another possibility is to say that the Bill should be used for serious offences—those punishable by imprisonment. Amendment No. 1 seeks to remove from the scope of the Bill offences at the bottom end.

Under the Bill, it is theoretically possible for an extremely wide range of offences, including minor, petty offences such as parking offences, to be prosecuted. Clearly, that is not the intention of the Government or of the hon. Member for Eastbourne. However, a mechanism is needed to ensure that the Bill cannot be misused in terms of individual decisions being taken low down the tree of responsibility.

Mr. Waterson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, for example, the offence of threatening behaviour under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which could well arise in football hooliganism cases, would be caught by the amendment, because it is not an offence that can be dealt with on indictment, but can be dealt with only on a summary basis?

Mr. Michael: Yes. That is why I made it clear that the amendments, which were drafted within an hour or two

of the completion of the Committee stage, because that was the only way in which to ensure that they could be considered today, are not ones that I would press to a vote. The intention is not to undermine the purposes of the Bill. The intention is to get assurances that the Minister will consider the points that we raised in Committee and will ensure that there is a mechanism that will help to ensure that the problem I have highlighted is addressed.

I have made it clear from the beginning that these are not perfect amendments. They are designed to ensure that the points I have raised are explored on Report. As I said, the Minister has had only from Wednesday until today to consider those important and wide-ranging points. I point out, however, that the Opposition had only Wednesday afternoon in which to consider what amendments to table, to ensure that various matters were raised. I hope that the Minister and the hon. Member for Eastbourne accept that less serious offences should not be pursued under the Bill. I want them to tell the House how that will be ensured.

Last year, when we discussed sex tourism, the Minister suggested that the House should be careful not to rush into extra-territoriality; I reread the *Hansard* report of that debate a couple of days ago. This Bill goes very wide. When replying on amendment No. 1, the Minister will have to satisfy the House that we shall not use the Bill to pursue the most minor matters and that there will be a mechanism to ensure that the Bill is used to hit the intended target—the target that has led both sides of the House to support the Bill. I do not want to labour the point further. I hope that the Minister will give a positive response and that we can move on to consider more serious offences.

Mr. Galloway: These whole proceedings have been an outrage. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) has just made clear, the Committee stage finished on Wednesday. My hon. Friend has complained that he had almost no opportunity to contemplate amendments to table on Report. It remains to be seen whether the Minister can assuage the doubts, such as they are, of Labour Front-Bench Members in the short time available.

The amendment does not go nearly far enough in that it implies a safeguard against abuse that is not there. The Bill, even if amended by this milk and water amendment, will change political asylum in this country in a profound and dangerous way. It will change a state of affairs that has existed since Napoleonic times.

The Minister may hope that he can disturb me; I assure him that he will not be able to disturb my flow. I was unable to be present for the Second Reading debate because I was not in the country, but I am here now, as the Minister will learn during our proceedings. I am here now to argue that the Bill is an extraordinary and ill-considered measure. I make no personal accusation against the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), the promoter of the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth said, this is a Government Bill in all but name. It is a hasty and ill-considered response to the specific issue of a political asylum case—

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Those of us who have dealt with the Bill on Second Reading, in Committee and today know that the amendments are narrowly drafted. They deal simply with whether the offences covered by the Bill are liable to indictment or summary trial. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), who was not present for the Second Reading debate, to give a long speech on the principle of the Bill, which is not germane to the amendments?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I assure the hon. Gentleman that I have listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) is saying. He referred to the amendment, but he is going a little wide of it now. I ask him to return to the amendment.

Mr. Galloway: My contention is that the amendment does not go far enough and I hope to persuade the House of that point. I am sorry that I was unable to attend the Second Reading debate. I did, however, attempt to become a member of the Committee that considered the Bill. I wrote to the hon. Member for Eastbourne and I telephoned his office. I would very much have liked to have been a member of the Committee so that I could express my strong views during the line-by-line, proper parliamentary scrutiny. Alas, no place could be found for me.

I was glad to receive a letter from the hon. Member for Eastbourne saying that he was personally sorry that he had been unable to find a place for me. I wrote to him saying that I was glad to hear that because that was not the information that had been fed to me. I had heard that he would not have me on the Committee under any circumstances. I was pleased by his reassurance because if he had not wanted me on the Committee, it would have meant that he was frightened to face my arguments. The amendment does not go far enough. It is misleading to the public and the House in the sense that it purports to be a safeguard against abuse, but cannot be. I am not a lawyer, but I follow issues of political asylum closely and nothing in the Bill or the amendment provides a legal safeguard against abuse. To leave it to a here-today, gone-tomorrow Attorney-General to decide who is a terrorist's friend and who is a freedom fighter's friend is an absolute outrage.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman talks of safeguards. I wonder whether he has applied his mind to the principle of dual criminality which is a central part of the Bill.

Mr. Galloway: Yes, I have, and that provides no safeguard either because, such are the horrors in their own country and their well-founded fear of persecution for their political views, those who are in exile and have been granted political asylum here, almost by definition come from places where the position can be changed only by what would be considered criminal means.

10 am

How can the Iraqi opposition get rid of Saddam Hussein except by violent means? There is no other way in which he can be overthrown. Members of the Iraqi National Congress, which occupies a very plush office opposite Harrods, spend every day plotting the violent overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Personally, I pray for their

[Mr. Galloway]

success, as does every right-thinking hon. Member. However, they are inciting their countrymen to commit an illegal act. Nothing in the amendment would preclude an Attorney-General taking action against the Iraqi National Congress because of its daily incitement of illegality in Iraq.

Conservative Members may laugh. Of course they are in favour of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, but that was not always the case. In the 1970s when my colleagues and I were founding the Campaign Against Repression and for Democratic Rights in Iraq, Conservative Members sat on sofas with Saddam Hussein trying to sell him guns. When CARDRI, of which I was a founder member, called for illegal, violent action, which some would describe as terrorist action to overthrow the Government of Saddam Hussein, there would have been nothing in the amendment to stop a Conservative Attorney-General taking action against us. By definition, such dissidents would have been a threat to United Kingdom trade. After all, that was al-Masari's crime. He was threatening and jeopardising United Kingdom arms contracts with the Saudi Arabian dictatorship. So when Saddam Hussein was a blue-eyed boy as far as Conservative Members were concerned, his opponents might have been seen to have been jeopardising British trade, including arms contracts. The amendment would in no way have protected those dissidents who were here lawfully as political refugees.

That is why the amendment is simply inadequate as a safeguard against the Attorney-General's fiat of describing this dissident at this time as a freedom fighter and that dissident at that time as a terrorist who must be quashed.

Mandela was referred to on Second Reading and this morning by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). I fail to see how the amendment addresses the points that were made.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): The hon. Gentleman must accept that circumstances change. Not so many years ago, the Palestine Liberation Organisation allowed a Japanese terrorist organisation to shoot people at Lod airport. Now, however, Yasser Arafat is the leader of an established nation. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that an amendment of some kind is necessary to control terrorism in Britain and someone has to decide who is a terrorist and who is a freedom fighter?

Mr. Galloway: We are all in favour of controlling terrorism in Britain. Surely not a single hon. Member has any truck with terrorism here, but we are talking about terrorism in other countries and what is defined as terrorism by foreign dictatorships where there is no democratic process. I shall deal with Palestine, with which I am exceedingly familiar, or at least as familiar as any other hon. Member, but for the moment I should like to continue making my point about Mandela.

The amendment would not have protected the activities of Nelson Mandela when he was here in exile because he was calling for and organising activities that were indictable offences in his own country, punishable by imprisonment.

Mr. Michael: Perhaps it would be helpful if I underlined the fact that two extremes need to be protected: one is the possibility that serious offences might be alleged and the other, which the amendment seeks to address, is that the Bill might be used against minor offences committed abroad. Therefore, there are two sets of amendments attacking both ends of the scale.

Mr. Galloway: Indeed. I am sure that we shall return to that when we discuss the other amendments. Amendment No. 1 was proposed as a safeguard, but it does not go nearly far enough. Nelson Mandela was arguing, organising and raising funds and all the people with whom he worked are now rightly considered heroes by the British state. Just a few yards from here, in Westminster Hall, Madam Speaker made one of the most moving speeches I have ever heard in the presence of President Mandela in which she described how she felt during his early leadership of the African National Congress, including his visit here. At the time, Nelson Mandela was collecting funds for, organising, advocating, inciting and conspiring for the armed wing of the ANC—Umkhonto we Sizwe—to commit violent acts that were indictable here and in South Africa and punishable by imprisonment. Under the Bill and the amendment, which does not go far enough, President Mandela would have been clapped in irons. There is no doubt about that.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I have been following the hon. Gentleman's speech with great interest as I am not really conversant with the Bill, but he has now said, "The amendment does not go far enough" four times. I get the feeling that no amendment would go far enough.

Mr. Galloway: That is not the point. In my humble opinion—and I am humble in front of the venerable and distinguished hon. Member—that comment does not behove him. He is a splendid Liberal and a splendid veteran of the anti-apartheid cause. Perhaps he should listen a little more carefully.

Sir Russell Johnston: I was not intending to make a joke. It simply seemed to me that the hon. Gentleman was advancing arguments that in substance are against the whole idea of having such a Bill at all.

Mr. Galloway: Clearly, the time has gone when I would have been permitted to do that. I am anxious to ensure that the Bill has real safeguards. I had no time to table amendments. After all, we did not know until yesterday afternoon that the Bill would be coming before the House today—a matter about which my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth complained.

I am anxious to find a means by which Parliament can politically prescribe circumstances in which action under the Bill would be taken. I am anxious to avoid not only a diminution of our civil liberties and the rights of political refugees but the chaos and congestion in the legal system which will result from the Bill, about which I shall argue when I have the opportunity. Some of our hon. Friends will no doubt be gainfully employed in their other tasks as lawyers because the Bill will result in court cases by the hundred every year. The legislation is rushed in response to a specific and, for the Government, highly embarrassing political refugee case—that of Professor al-Masari, who was a thorn in the side of the Government of Saudi Arabia.

I should like to continue my point about Nelson Mandela and how the amendment would not go remotely far enough to protect him. Mandela was here organising armed action against the South African dictatorship. Indeed, not so long ago, it was absolutely routine for Conservative Members—we all know who they are—to denounce President Mandela as a terrorist and the African National Congress as a terrorist organisation.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I was surprised to find when I arrived half an hour before President Mandela spoke in Westminster Hall that the first four rows of seats were occupied by all the Tory Members of Parliament who had wanted to hang, draw and quarter him.

Mr. Galloway: That was one of the most extraordinary sights in modern times. The whole world of course rejoices if a sinner repents. None the less, even in my time in the House, which is less than 10 years, it was routine for Conservative Members to denounce President Mandela as a terrorist leader. Indeed, their co-party workers used openly to sell and wear "Hang Nelson Mandela" T-shirts at Conservative party conferences. That was just in the past few years, when the whole world, apart from such dinosaurs, had come to regard Mandela as a world statesman of premier rank and indispensable to the solution of the crisis in southern Africa.

How much more the argument would have applied to Nelson Mandela when he was in this country organising armed action almost 40 years earlier. What would an Attorney-General have done if the proposed power had been available of Mr. Mandela's clandestine trip to London to gain funds for and help organise terrorist action? There is no getting away from that point, although some of my hon. Friends would like to. Under the Bill, Nelson Mandela was involved in commissioning, inciting and conspiring to commit terrorist action; he was organising people to carry guns to shoot members of the security forces of the sovereign Government of South Africa—a recognised Government with whom we had diplomatic relations.

Nelson Mandela was conspiring, organising, commissioning, and inciting people to cause explosions, which they did, without number. Such explosions were organised from here and states adjacent to South Africa. The famous example given on Second Reading was that of explosions among electricity pylons. It was used because it sounds the most innocuous possible definition of terrorism. Not all the ANC's bombs went off under electricity pylons, though. Some of them went off in very much more damaging places. If the power in the Bill had been available when President Mandela was here, one can imagine the hue and cry that we would have heard from the Conservative Benches in order to ensure, untrammelled by the amendment, that the legislation was used to stop him commissioning, inciting and conspiring to commit such terrorist acts.

10.15 am

I gave unconditional support to the ANC's armed struggle against apartheid, but not every Member was prepared to. I make no apology for it. It gained me a warm embrace from President Mandela, which is one of the most treasured achievements of my life. The reality, however, is that on many occasions there would have been a majority in the House of Commons in favour of deploying the Bill to clap him in irons. The South African Government would have been demanding that it be done; the British multinational companies which profited so hugely from the slavery of apartheid would have been pressing that it be done; memos would have gone backwards and forwards between captains of industry, the military industrial complex, and Ministers and other forces, the Bernard Levins and the rest, who would have no doubt taken to the columns, as others would have taken to the airwaves, to create an atmosphere that would have led the Attorney-General to say, "This man's conduct is in breach of this law. The amendment does not stop that being so and we will prosecute him." Where would we have been in those circumstances? How would we have faced President Mandela in Westminster Hall?

I have dealt with the issue of President Mandela because he would not have been protected by the amendment, contrary to what my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth sought to imply.

Mr. Michael: I should make it clear again that the amendment is intended to ensure that, by providing extra-territorial jurisdiction and the power to prosecute, the Bill does not cover minor offences abroad, such as bicycle offences and the like, as well as prosecutions for offences relating to violence. The amendment is not intended to deal with a set of political and moral judgments that my hon. Friend is addressing, which subsequent amendments seek to address. The amendment specifically deals with the bottom end of offences and a quite different mischief, which, in the interests of everybody, should be excluded from the Bill by some mechanism.

Mr. Galloway: But my point is that—we can consult the record—it has been claimed in support of the amendment that it is some kind of civilising measure, protection or means by which the worst excesses of abuse of the legislation can in part be curbed. I take my hon. Friend's point that other amendments will, in his view, buttress that further.

Mr. Michael: By trying to outline the Opposition's intention generally, I may have gone beyond the amendment's intentions. I wanted to make it clear that two issues need to be dealt with. The amendment was not intended to deal with the one to which my hon. Friend is primarily referring.

Mr. Galloway: Obviously, if I had not been in order, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would have stopped me. I am entitled to address the speech that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth made in support of his amendment, and that is what I am trying to do.

I have dwelt on the issue of President Mandela precisely because he is such a cosy and well-loved figure nowadays. It was not always thus. No doubt in their dark hearts some Conservatives still regard President Mandela as a terrorist, although I doubt whether many would be prepared to admit it. I could think of one, perhaps two, whose travel plans have been gravely altered by the change in South Africa.

Mr. Leigh: It has given the hon. Gentleman new travel opportunities.

Mr. Galloway: I did not travel to South Africa in the old days and I have not done so recently, but I accept that

[Mr. Galloway]

jibe in the spirit in which it was offered. I have chosen Nelson Mandela's case because it is an easy case. Almost nobody would now say that they would have wanted him to be prosecuted under this legislation. One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. That saying is a cliche because it is so true. Nelson Mandela was always a freedom fighter to me, but to some Conservative Members, for a long time, he was a terrorist. Some still probably cannot get their lips around the words "freedom fighter".

I shall take another example of people who are terrorists to me, but are probably freedom fighters to some Conservative Members. I was for many years—I used to travel to Nicaragua regularly—a supporter of the Frente Sandinista, the liberation movement in Nicaragua, which came to power by armed insurrection in 1979, having captured the Nicaraguan Parliament. A man with a red bandanna took all the Ministers hostage including, I am sorry to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Speaker of the Nicaraguan Parliament. The entire Parliament was held hostage, much as the people in the Japanese embassy in Lima is being held hostage today. The entire Parliament was seized by Nicaraguan revolutionaries and the whole exercise ended soon afterwards with a victory for the revolutionary forces.

I was with the Sandinistas when they were a revolutionary front opposing the Somosa dictatorship in Nicaragua. The United States said of Somosa, "He may be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch." I was with the Sandinistas then and when they were in power, but people who were against the Sandinistas were operating in this country. The so-called Contras were fund-raising and organising terrorist action from this country against the Government of Nicaragua.

Just as in Nelson Mandela's case, many Conservative Members were on the wrong side. They supported the Contras, and attended their functions. At least the African National Congress tried to avoid civilian casualties in their struggle against apartheid. The Contras' whole raison d'etre was to wreak as much human damage as possible. They cut people's throats and pulled out their tongues to hang like neckties. They caused mass destruction and suffering in Nicaragua, but they were supported by some Conservative Members and regularly feted at Conservative party conferences, although admittedly on the fringe. Sometimes the same people one day wore a "Hang Nelson Mandela" T-shirt and the next an "I support the Contras" T-shirt.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is an interesting tour of world geography, but it would be more helpful if the hon. Gentleman could return his attention to the amendment we are discussing.

Mr. Galloway: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I was flying too far and wide of the amendments. My point is that the Nicaraguan Contras operated in London, inciting, inspiring and commissioning acts of terrorism. I found their actions revolting. However, it would not have been right—in the unlikely event that I were the Attorney-General—for me to have prosecuted the Contras under this legislation, untrammelled by the amendments, because I detested them and regarded them as terrorists. It cannot be right that one man, the Attorney-General, should be given the power to decide who is a terrorist and who is a freedom fighter. That is the power that the Bill would give the Attorney-General and the amendments do not go nearly far enough in putting the hems on that untrammelled power.

The Bill will cause a grave diminution in the political rights of our people which have been cherished for centuries and, for many decades at least, were cherished even by members of the Conservative party, who welcomed to this country revolutionaries such as Kossuth after the wave of revolutions in 1848. Kossuth was a Hungarian who led an armed, terrorist struggle against the Austro-Hungarian empire from his sanctuary in London. He would not have been protected by the amendments: he would have been prosecuted under the Bill, had it existed at the time.

Perhaps some Conservative Members wish that Karl Marx had been prosecuted, but this country's reputation would have been gravely diminished if he had been, when he was labouring in the British museum and calling for the beheading of the European kings. Several of those monarchs wrote in congress to the British Government to ask that he be prosecuted, but the then Conservative Government replied that the mere advocacy of regicide was not a crime in Britain and that Mr. Marx was free and welcome to continue his labours in the British museum. How different were that Government from today's Conservatives—the nouveau Tories—to whom such love of liberty is a foreign and distant concept.

The Bill would not be sufficiently improved by the amendments. I oppose the amendments because they do not go far enough. No doubt, if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will have other opportunities to speak on the other amendments and later on Third Reading. I thank you for your indulgence so far.

Mr. Waterson: We have had an interesting debate on the amendments and a pleasant stroll down memory lane for those who have fond memories of old Labour. The amendments, which have a narrow compass, would provide that the substantive offences in clauses 1 and 2 would need to be first triable in a Crown court and punishable by imprisonment. As the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) said when he moved the amendments, they would exclude offences that are triable only on a summary basis in the magistrates court or are not punishable by imprisonment.

Under English law, there are only three categories of offences—those that can be tried only on indictment, those that can be tried only on a summary basis and those that have an option to be tried on either basis. The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth would eliminate the offences that he perceives to be unimportant, at the bottom end of the scale or less high profile. The terminology is difficult, but those are the expressions that were used on Second Reading and Committee. The hon. Gentleman suggests that there are some circumstances in which it would not matter too much if people in this country were conspiring to commit offences abroad, even in cases in which the test of dual criminality was properly satisfied. I will be blunt: I do not subscribe to that view, and I gave the example in an intervention earlier of the

offence of threatening behaviour under the Public Order Act 1986, which carries a term of imprisonment of six months but is a summary offence.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman has taken the point that I was making when I moved the amendment. I made it clear that the amendment is not a perfect mechanism, and I seek some assurance that offences that the hon. Gentleman would agree should not be pursued, will not be pursued. It is not clear how that can be effected in the Bill as it stands, so it needs to be dealt with either in the Bill or by some other mechanism. I look to the hon. Gentleman and the Minister to provide reassurance.

Mr. Waterson: I take that point. In fairness to the hon. Gentleman, I agree that he said that he did not regard the amendment as a clear-cut solution to the problem that he described. However, I am not sure whether I accept that there is a problem. As I have said during previous debates on my Bill, the point of it is to take the approach set out in the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996 and extend it right across the spectrum of the criminal law in this country.

Mr. Michael *rose—*

Mr. Waterson: May I finish this thought?

I do not see any point in trying to distinguish in any of those ways between types of offence considered serious and those considered not so serious. I have said that on more than one occasion.

10.30 am

Mr. Michael: Yes, but the hon. Gentleman might reflect on the fact that when we debated the same issues last year, the Minister said that we should be careful how far we go into extra-territoriality, which is what the Bill is all about. He said that we should ensure that we did not go beyond the intended mark. I turn those remarks back now, because last year the Minister was too hesitant, whereas now we may be going even further than the hon. Gentleman intends. Where is the mechanism to ensure that that does not happen?

Mr. Waterson: We shall hear shortly what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say. I am not trying to duck the debate, but I think that some of the later groups of amendments will give us more scope to look at mechanisms and how they will or will not work.

On the specific issue that we are discussing, certain offences come to mind. I have thought of one, but there may be other examples. Threatening behaviour, for example, would be an appropriate charge to bring in the context of football hooliganism—one of the high-profile issues that we have recently debated in connection with the Bill. British so-called fans plan to go abroad to football matches, and they conspire, possibly with fans abroad, to cause criminal acts.

I shall return to the general point, promising to return to other matters, as we must, on other amendments. In view of the sheer generality of my Bill, which covers the whole sweep of the criminal law in this country, I do not see how we can draw such boundaries. More importantly, I do not see why they should be considered either necessary or desirable. I therefore invite the hon. Gentleman to seek leave to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Kirkhope: It is clear that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) seeks to eliminate what he perceives to be "unimportant" offences. He is saying that in some instances it does not matter if people in this country are conspiring to commit offences abroad, even when the test of dual criminality is satisfied.

As I said in earlier proceedings on the Bill, I do not subscribe to that view and I cannot accept it.

Mr. Galloway: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Kirkhope: Not until I have got a little further.

Mr. Galloway: On that very point?

Mr. Kirkhope: Not at the moment.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said, affray is a summary offence. That was a good example. If we accepted the amendments and thus could not apply the Bill to such behaviour, that would leave a considerable gap in our ability to deter people and to deal with crime and international bad behaviour. That is important in the context of the Bill.

I listened with some interest to the meandering speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway). Had the hon. Gentleman been here on Second Reading, he would have been able to contribute a view to the argument about whether one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. We debated that idea fully then and the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who is not in the Chamber today, made a long and interesting speech. My hon. Friends felt that it was totally wrong that someone should be able to use this country as a haven for the plotting and planning of criminal acts in other countries.

Mr. Galloway: It is only right that the Minister should allow me to intervene, as he has referred to me, although he looked as though he was giving way to me with a heavy heart.

The analogy that the Minister used cannot be true. I am willing to accept that he did not support the African National Congress's freedom struggle—I am fairly certain that he did not—and I am even willing to accept that he did not support the Contra revolutionaries in Nicaragua, but it is stretching things a little to believe that he would not support violent criminal action to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Looking back into history, does he feel that he would have had to offer support to the French resistance, whose members were committing acts of sabotage and cutting the throats of the Nazi occupiers of France? Under the Bill, they and their supporters here in Britain would have been guilty of an offence.

Mr. Kirkhope: I do not support the idea of anyone using our country to incite others to commit crimes elsewhere, any more than I support the actions of Members of Parliament who suggest that others should fail to pay their poll tax or disobey the law in this country in any other way.

[Mr. Kirkhope]

If we accepted the amendments, we would deny ourselves the possibility of taking action to deal with many offences which, although they may be triable on a summary basis, are not minor or insignificant in the effect that they may have elsewhere. Therefore, I fully support the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne and the Government recommend that the House does not accept the amendments.

Mr. Michael: The Minister said that he did not subscribe to the idea that it does not matter that there are some offences arising abroad which involve some act in this country. That is the precise argument that he and other Ministers used when we were trying to persuade them to pursue people involved in sex tourism and child abuse abroad. When we suggested that Britain should go further in providing powers to pursue such people, the Minister responded by saying that we should be careful not to go too far and hit too wide a target.

I agree that the amendment is not a perfect mechanism. As both the Minister and the hon. Member for Eastbourne have said, the amendment as drafted—it was drafted rapidly—would have unintended consequences. That is why I do not intend to press it to a vote. However, the Minister should take note of the lower end of the spectrum of offences—the less evil activity which might be prosecuted under the Bill unless some mechanism is put in place. We tabled the amendment because all our debate in Committee was about the higher end of the spectrum of offences—the sort of serious issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) raised. I want to ensure that the danger of the Bill's being used against petty offences that do not have that significance, and do not involve violence, is understood and taken into account. I urge the Minister to take that point and to consider it in the context of the overall mechanism that the Bill will introduce. If he cannot do that, will he ensure that the point is dealt with by the time the Bill goes to another place? Hon. Members on both sides of the House would find that satisfactory.

I have made my point, and I hope that it has been properly registered. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Leigh: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 2, line 16, leave out from beginning to end of line 24.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 12, in page 2, line 25, leave out

', if it thinks fit, may' and insert 'shall'.

No. 13, in page 2, line 27, leave out from 'satisfied' to end of line 28.

Mr. Leigh: The amendments have been tabled in response to concerns that the Bill as it stands could be seen to place responsibility on the defence to disprove an element of the prosecution's case when, due to the complex nature of the alleged offences, the defence may not have the resources to do that. My amendments would remove proposed sections 1A(8) and 1A(9) and, if they were accepted by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), would amend the Criminal Law Act 1977 to read:

"The court may permit the defence to require the prosecution to show that the second condition is satisfied".

At present, proposed section 1A(9) states:

"The court, if it thinks fit, may permit the defence to require the prosecution to show that the second condition is satisfied".

For those who are not familiar with the legislation, the second condition is that the offence is illegal in the other jurisdiction as well as our own. The trouble with the Bill at present is that it is possible for the court to put the onus on the defence to prove that an offence was committed abroad. I will explain why I think that that would be unfair and contrary to our traditions.

The Bill demonstrates our commitment to do our bit in halting international—and particularly organised—crime. There is no dispute about that, as I am sure that even the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) will recognise. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is particularly disturbed about football hooliganism, and I share his concerns. During the Second Reading debate on 31 January, hon. Members—including me—spoke of terrorism and other forms of international crime. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence)—who unfortunately is not able to join us today, but who made an interesting speech in that debate—referred to the report on organised crime produced by the Home Affairs Select Committee, which he chairs. He described the Bill as a partial response to that report.

Those who support the Bill and want to see it become law hope that it will deter those who would use Britain as a base for plotting international crime or for fomenting terrorism. We hope that the Bill will answer foreign criticism—we have discussed the issue both in the Chamber and in Committee—that our present laws allow people to act in a manner that is damaging to other countries and to our reputation abroad while not necessarily causing physical damage here. Such criticism harms our international standing: that is why we want the Bill to become law.

Although we support the concept of permitting the prosecution in this country of people who conspire to commit crimes abroad, it means that the prosecution must fully abide by the traditions and procedures of our criminal and our common law as that law has developed over many centuries. For instance, it has long been a tradition that anyone who is brought before a criminal court does not have to prove his or her innocence. The court must hear and assess the evidence and prove that a triable offence was committed in the first place. That is why we have committal proceedings.

As a practitioner at the criminal Bar, I have spent many hours arguing that point in committal proceedings. From the start of proceedings in the magistrates court, through committal proceedings to the Crown court, the prosecution must prove all the required elements of the offence and prove that the defendant is guilty of committing that offence. As the Bill is presently drafted, proposed subsection (8) may be viewed as placing the onus on the defence, not on the prosecution, to adduce evidence before the trial that an offence has been committed in a foreign jurisdiction. No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne will remind me that

proposed subsection (9) allows the court the discretion to overrule that provision. Why has my hon. Friend drafted the Bill in this way? It seems rather strange, but he may have good reasons for doing so. I am happy to accept his advice.

10.45 am

Mr. Waterson: The Bill's wording follows the precedent set out in part I of the Criminal Justice Act 1993—legislation with which I am sure my hon. Friend is extremely familiar.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification. It may be true: I appreciate that, when forming legislation, the parliamentary draftsmen often base their drafting on previous legislation. However, the matters with which criminal justice Acts deal are often very different from the highly complex issues that we must address in this area.

I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) in his place. During the Second Reading debate, he said:

"it should be for the prosecution to prove, as it would if it were seeking extradition, that the offence is an offence in both jurisdictions."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. 612.]

I have moved the amendments today because I thought my hon. Friend made an interesting point that deserved to be discussed on the Floor of the House at Report stage. As legislators considering criminal law, we must ensure that when we devise this sort of legislation we do not make the task of prosecutors in criminal trials too easy at the expense of the defendant. Our traditions are about ensuring that there is a balance between the prosecution and the defence.

The real problem is demonstrating that an offence took place in a foreign jurisdiction. Who would find it easier to learn of alleged crimes that were committed abroad? As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East pointed out, there is an enormous disparity between the resources of the prosecution and those of the defence. Let us take one random example. Would an ordinary firm of solicitors in a small industrial market town such as Gainsborough—

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North–East): Where is Gainsborough?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend's sedentary intervention is quite uncalled for—he should know where Gainsborough is. It is a small town with excellent solicitors, but how could they know whether an act complained of is contrary to Islamic law, for example? It would be beyond the resources of large firms of solicitors in London to investigate that matter. Islamic law—although very worth while in itself—is highly complex. If we conceive of a prosecution being brought against a group for plotting or fomenting revolution in Iran, for example, a defence solicitor may have to research Islamic law. Where would he find the resources to do that?

On the other hand, the prosecution is uniquely advantaged in that respect as it is backed by all the resources of the state. Activities which are difficult—or well nigh impossible—for a firm of solicitors are feasible for the Government and all its agencies. Therefore, it is in the interests of justice and of practicality that the state should always be responsible for proving that the second condition—that the alleged offence would be an offence abroad—has been met. My amendments are simple. They want to make that clear on the face of the Bill. They are simply designed to ensure that the traditional fairness of our criminal justice system applies to those who might face prosecution under the Bill.

I have some sympathy with some of the points made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). If he has had a chance to read *Hansard* he will see that I made some similar points myself on Second Reading and in Committee. Time and again, I have pointed out that while I support the Bill we cannot—for all the hon. Gentleman said—tolerate groups fomenting international terrorism. I always think of the example of the War Crimes Act 1991: there has been only one prosecution under that Act and it ended in a débâcle.

If the Bill is to become an Act, it must be drafted sensibly and fairly. We must ensure that we deal with the right sort of issues and that when a trial comes to court it is properly prepared. I should have thought that my modest amendment would at least ensure more fairness in any prosecutions. To that extent, I hope that it will assuage some criticism of the Bill and reassure those who have genuine worries about it as it stands.

Mr. Butler: I support my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and I promise that immediately after the debate I will find out where Gainsborough is: I apologise for not knowing. I support my hon. Friend's amendments, which seem to deal with a significant defect in the Bill—exactly the defect that I raised on Second Reading and that he raised subsequently and again today. It is simply not fair to put the onus on the defence to prove a point that it is not within its competence to prove.

The requirement under proposed subsection (8) is that if the defence wishes the prosecution to be put on proof, it has to state the condition—that is, that dual criminality is not in their opinion satisfied—and show its grounds for that opinion and for requiring the prosecution to do so. The Bill is also defective in terms of what grounds can be shown. Who is to assess whether the grounds are adequate? For instance, will the ground that one cannot find out be sufficient? That is likely to be the real ground.

If the Bill is not amended, can the defence go to court and say, "We simply do not know whether there is dual criminality. We cannot find out." Is the defence able to say that it cannot find out because the legal aid authority will not certify the costs involved? The defence might say that it cannot even estimate the costs. A best estimate might be £5,000 for having research done in a foreign country by foreign agents, presumably with a notarised result, brought to the defence and put before the court. The legal aid authority is highly unlikely to authorise that sum. Is that sufficient ground for the opinion that dual criminality is not established? It is not a question of the common use of language—it can be sufficient grounds—but that the only grounds for the opinion are that we do not know and we do not know is not an opinion that it is not satisfied.

Without playing too many semantic games, the Bill as it stands could pose difficulties. The proposer has to answer those questions if the Bill is to proceed

[Mr. Butler]

unamended. What are the grounds? Are the grounds that we do not know and cannot find out adequate? Is anyone going to look into those grounds and discuss them? What would be the effect on the judge if the time limit under subsection (8) were missed, but the defence on the day of the trial, at the pre-trial review or shortly before the day of the trial—outwith the established time limit set by the rules of court—said that it had come to its notice that the offence might not be an offence in Burkina Faso or wherever? The court then only has a discretion to permit the defence to require the prosecution to show that it is satisfied. How is that discretion to be used?

This is not a mere lawyers' game of saying, "Everyone knows that it is dual criminality; the issue is whether we can prove it." Unless it is proven, it cannot be known, and unless a procedure is laid down in the Bill for it to be proven by the only party to criminal proceedings with the resources and facilities to do so, we run the risk of people being convicted for offences that cannot have been committed under the Bill. We will not know, and the idea that people can be prosecuted and convicted on the basis that they might have committed an offence is alien to the British criminal law: it has to be proven beyond reasonable doubt.

For this offence, the starting point would have to be dual criminality. I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that unless there is dual criminality there should be no prosecution and that prosecution for such conspiracy cannot lie, as the Bill states. With the greatest respect, I therefore suggest to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) that although my name appears below his as one of the supporters of the Bill there is a defect—it was pointed out on Second Reading, so there has been adequate time to deal with it—and I hope that in his reply or in that of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State we will hear how it is to be dealt with, either in the Bill as it stands or by adopting the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle so that it can be avoided altogether.

Mr. Galloway: I intrude with some trepidation on these fascinating, lawyerly, sincere and important contributions. I shall be interested to hear the outcome.

I must deal with the point made about Islamic law by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) when moving his amendment. I think that we can all accept that, notwithstanding the many examples that I gave of the sort of cases that could be tried, the most likely to be tried in the present political climate under this legislation are those relating to middle eastern or other Islamic countries. That is the atmosphere in which the measure was born. For the purposes of the argument, it is a likely hypothesis.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle pointed out—out of respect, I am sure—that Islamic law is complex. As a matter of fact, it is not—it is basic and open to interpretation. Saudi Arabia, for example, has no written law. There is no law in Saudi Arabia other than the sharia, which was written many centuries ago. No doubt it is a fount of great wisdom, but it is not up to date with the development of criminal law in other parts of the world, so it is subject to constant interpretation. In Saudi Arabia, the people who interpret Islamic law and decide whether a matter is an offence under their jurisdiction and so satisfies the point about dual criminality, are clerics in the two mosques, who are hand-picked and effectively agents of the Saudi Arabian Government. Whatever one thinks of them or of that Government, that is a matter of fact.

In short, there is no law in Saudi Arabia but that which that regime declares to be legal or illegal at any one time and that interpretation can, and does, change. Things are illegal one day that were legal the day before. Saudi Arabia has no Parliament, of course, and no free courts. The defence has no rights. I was fascinated by the description given by the hon. Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle and for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) of the great safeguards and the importance of the justice system in this country. I was thinking about Saudi Arabia, where there are no safeguards and people go missing, or are kept in dungeons and do not appear in any court. When they do, they are charged with offences under the sharia, as interpreted by the clerics who have been hand-picked by the Saudi Arabian regime.

That is true of other countries in the Islamic world. I hope that the Minister will say how he will ascertain in such countries whether dual criminality has been satisfied. Will he write to King Fahd and ask whether the act being commissioned, incited or conspired about in this country is an offence? He had better not ask under which code, clause or Act it is an offence, because there are no codes, clauses or Acts in Saudi Arabia, where there is no Parliament, no freedom and no due process of law.

I do not accept that the implementation of Islamic law by the Saudi regime is a due process, and I do not think that the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle does either, although it may suit his purpose to be allied with that Government at this time—a Government who preside over the dragging of people to public squares and their beheading, and the chopping off of people's hands or feet without due process, proper defence or any codified law.

11 am

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting point and we are having a worthwhile little debate. He is obviously familiar with Saudi Arabian and Islamic law in a way in which I am not. What would happen if a group in this country was plotting to plant bombs in Saudi Arabia—clearly an offence under our law—given that little is written down under Islamic law, which was decreed by the prophet many centuries ago and is subject to interpretation by religious groups? How would a firm of solicitors in this country, or the Crown Prosecution Service, proceed? To what authorities would they go under Saudi Arabian law? Is it written down? That worries me, and the hon. Gentleman, with his knowledge of the subject, may be able to help.

Mr. Galloway: With pleasure. It would be different in different countries. Not all countries that claim to implement Islamic law are as utterly bereft of due process as Saudi Arabia. In some other Islamic countries, the religious authorities—the Ulema—have a certain independence and can decide whether such and such a matter is an offence. That is not the case in Saudi Arabia, where the head of the Islamic council, Sheikh Bin Baz, is a hand-picked factotum of an unelected, dictatorial Government—a mediaeval tyranny.

Frankly, if the Crown Prosecution Service addressed a letter to Sheikh Bin Baz asking whether something was an offence, he would refer it to the King. In fact, one could save the stamp by asking Mr. Algosaibi, the ambassador in London, who could tell one whether a matter was an offence. That is a monstrosity, and a great mismatch with our due process of law and all the wonderful safeguards that we have built up over centuries to protect defendants' rights. We take enormous care—we are doing so this morning—before making any legislation. That is utterly mismatched with the state of affairs in a country such as Saudi Arabia, where there is no law, no due process and no democracy.

The answer to the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle is therefore that it would be at one and the same time very difficult and very easy. It would be easy in practice, because an offence would be whatever the King decreed was an offence at any particular time, which might be different from what he said the week before or would say a week later.

The mismatch to which I referred would be likely to lead to a clashing of gears between the two legal systems—if one can glorify the Saudi Arabian arrangements with that term—and that would create a tremendous shudder that could lead to injustice.

We should also consider the issue of occupied territory. Many places in the Islamic world are occupied, some of them debatably so. In many great universities and in the House, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) and I have often debated the Israeli occupation of various Arab lands, which continues even under the Oslo accord. Israel occupies some of the west bank, some of the Gaza strip, some of Syria and some of Lebanon.

What are the legal circumstances in those territories? If someone here, as an act of self-defence, is plotting armed struggle against the Israeli occupier, which law will apply? It is certainly not an offence under Syrian law to struggle against Israeli occupation of the Golan heights, which were seized in war and are recognised by international law and the United Nations as occupied territory; indeed, it is a national duty. Would we be talking about whether it was an offence under Israeli law or under Syrian law? I am sure that under Israeli law it is an offence to plot the overthrow of the Israeli military occupation, but it is not under Syrian law, and the Golan is Syrian territory.

What about the other Israeli-occupied Arab lands? Both points relating to the Islamic area are crucial to whether the Bill makes any sense. I would submit that on both counts the Bill is seriously flawed and deficient.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting and important point. An even more important point, on which he is touching, affects a future amendment: the resolution of the question is a political matter that ought to have the approval of the Attorney-General before any such prosecution is launched.

Mr. Galloway: At the very least, it should have the approval of the Attorney-General, although I am not entirely comfortable with vesting such sweeping powers in him. The hon. and learned Member for Burton has in part acknowledged my point about how politically charged all the issues that we are discussing will be, and how potentially disruptive it will be to our lives as well as our legal system.

I shall give a brief example. There is occupied land in Kashmir; 580,000 Pakistanis and Kashmiris in this country do not recognise India's right to jurisdiction over Kashmir, which is subject to a 50-year-old United Nations resolution, declaring it disputed territory. Two years ago, in conference, the Labour party accepted that it was disputed territory. That will be the stance of my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who is likely to be Foreign Secretary in a few weeks.

In that disputed territory, either a terrorist struggle or a freedom struggle is going on, depending on one's political viewpoint. Today and every Friday, the greater part of 580,000 citizens of this country pray for the success of that armed struggle in what they describe as occupied Kashmir, openly collecting money in mosques to support it.

Under which legal system would an offence be committed under dual criminality in occupied Kashmir? It is undoubtedly an offence under Indian law to seek to overthrow the occupation forces in Kashmir, but it is a national duty to Kashmiris, including those who live here. Three quarters of all Pakistanis in this country are Kashmiris from Mirpur. Every last one of them supports the armed struggle against Indian occupation and regards it as a freedom struggle. Under the Bill's dual criminality, they are committing an offence every week because they are inciting, supporting—one might say conspiring—and raising funds for the struggle in Kashmir. Whose law in Kashmir would they be breaking? Not Pakistani law; it is a national duty. Certainly not the moral code from which they draw their strength. However, they would be breaking Indian law.

There would be an offence under Israeli law in the Golan heights, but not under Syrian law. There would not be an offence under Jordanian law—at least in respect of most of the time about which we have been talking—in the west bank, but there would be under Israeli law. Islamic law is uncodified, very wide and vague and was written many centuries ago by the Prophet Mohammed. Its interpretation in Iran is wholly different from that in Saudi Arabia. The interpretation in Iran will differ from yesterday to today to next week, according to whose star is in the ascendant in its theocracy. There will be one interpretation today under Sheikh Bin Baz's latest orders and a different one under different orders next week. That shows the mismatch between our democratically arrived at, well-codified, tried and tested law and those of other countries, which are utterly different in character.

Mr. Waterson: There has been an interesting debate on this amendment. I am especially grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) for developing arguments that arose on Second Reading or in Committee.

On the remarks of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), it is wrong to hold up foreign legal systems to perhaps invidious comparisons with ours. We believe, perhaps slightly smugly, that we have the best legal system in the world. English common law is the envy of many parts of the world and has been exported widely. Other countries have evolved their own laws, systems and ways of doing things. He must not forget that the other part of the dual criminality test, which is crucial to my Bill, is that the offence must be a criminal offence in this country as well. That takes account of repressive

[Mr. Waterson]

regimes. I shall not follow him in awarding marks out of 10 to different regimes. Where something is an offence under a repressive regime, whether left or right—for example, if it were an offence in Iraq to issue leaflets criticising Saddam Hussein—if it is not an offence under our system, it will fall.

Mr. Galloway: What about a Syrian organisation in Britain that plotted armed action against the Israeli occupation of the Golan heights? Clearly, armed action is an offence in Britain. It is terrorism; let us call it what it is, at least in the Bill's terms. What about plotting an explosion at an Israeli army barracks, God forbid, on the Golan heights? That is not an offence in Syria, because Syria regards itself as being at war and under occupation. It is an offence in Israel, but the territory is not Israeli. How would dual criminality work in such circumstances?

11.15 am

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman raises a complex example, although I do not blame him. There would be a general onus on the prosecution in such cases to take advice from the Foreign Office about whether, de jure or de facto, we recognised a regime in a particular country or part of a country. I accept that that would be a matter for evidence.

To return to the central issue, the amendments would take away the presumption that the dual criminality test is satisfied. I regard the very existence of the dual criminality test as a crucial safeguard. The basis of the test is that the act in question would have to be an offence both in Britain and in the country where it was to be carried out. It would be open to the defence in all cases to require the prosecution to show that the test was satisfied. That is a vital safeguard for those engaged in peaceful activities in Britain that may be against the law of their own country.

The Bill's wording, as I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, follows the precedent in part I of the Criminal Justice Act 1993. It contains adequate safeguards in cases of doubt. It allows the defence to challenge the prosecution by serving a notice showing its grounds for believing that the test is not satisfied. In deference to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East, I do not believe that that requires the defence to prove anything directly, but it does require it at least to raise the possibility. However, there is an important alternative that allows the defence, with the permission of the court and the trial judge, to require the prosecution to show that the test is met without serving notice. That follows the pattern in some previous legislation that has used the same form of words to give the court discretion to allow a defence challenge without prior service of a notice.

I have found at least three precedents: the Computer Misuse Act 1990; the Civil Aviation (Amendment) Act 1996; and our old friend the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996. Clause 1 envisages a sequence of circumstances. Normally, the dual criminality test would be taken to have been satisfied. It makes the implicit assumption that the prosecution will not have embarked on the case without having first checked on the law in the country in question. Clause 1 builds in safeguards for the defendant. It allows the defence to give notice showing why it believes that dual criminality does not exist, for example by quoting elements in the foreign legal code that call the practice into question.

There is the further safeguard that the defence may seek to persuade the court at the trial to put the onus on the prosecution to establish dual criminality without the defence having first to show any reasons. It is a balanced, two-pronged approach to the issue, which safeguards defendants without putting unnecessary burdens on the prosecution. The amendment, by contrast, would place an unnecessary burden on the prosecution in cases where the dual criminality test was clear cut. I imagine that in many cases it would be straightforward that there was a breach of the foreign law.

In cases of doubt, however, the existing formulation will provide the necessary means for a challenge by the defence, either by notice, or at the trial, without notice and without grounds being given by the defence. I believe that the amendment is unnecessary and I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle to withdraw it.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I waited to hear how my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) would deal with the amendment before speaking. I remain very concerned about the Bill as currently drafted and support the amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

The starting point in dealing with dual criminality must be that both offences must be proved beyond reasonable doubt—both the offence in this country and the offence that is alleged to have been caused in the other country. In practice, a foreign country will make representations through its ambassador or through our foreign post to our Government. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office will then institute inquiries in the foreign country, using its intelligence sources as well as its normal diplomatic sources. Back will come a message from the foreign country to the FCO that, prime facie, it seems that the alleged criminality would be an offence. All the legal and other resources of the Foreign Office will have been marshalled to come to that conclusion.

The matter will then be referred to legal sources in this country, who will make their own decision and tell the CPS, or those responsible for prosecution, that in their view the second half of the dual criminality rule has been met. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle appropriately pointed out, it will then be for the solicitor to whom the defendant goes, in Gainsborough or wherever he resides, to find out what he can about the foreign jurisdiction. Goodness knows, one of the most complicated areas of law is the conflict of laws, as anyone who has studied law will know. It will be extremely difficult for the defendant to disprove the allegation. I find it particularly offensive that in cases heard by the Crown court, the question whether the second condition is satisfied is to be decided by the judge alone.

I add my voice to those who have urged my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne to reconsider the point. If he is not prepared to reconsider it here, I hope that the voices of those who have expressed reservations will be heard in another place.

Mr. Kirkhope: We have had an interesting debate. Although the Government cannot go down the lines

suggested in the amendments, they raise issues of enormous importance. I am a little surprised that hon. Members do not have more confidence that, by creating a dual criminality test, we are applying to all these matters the criminal law in this country, and that elsewhere. As I have said before, we welcome people who wish to exercise their freedom of expression and allow them to do all sorts of things in Britain, which is a free and democratic nation. If they fall foul of our criminal law—they would have to do so for the dual criminality test to be met—at least at that point, they can rely on the British justice system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) has given the House a number of examples of other legislation that contains precisely the same requirements as those in the Bill, to determine whether dual criminality applies. It is open to the defence to raise the issue, either using the basis of the court or in any other way. An obligation is then immediately placed on the prosecution to show to the satisfaction of the court that there is dual criminality; that there is an equivalence between the position in the other country and our position on the alleged offences. That seems to me a strong safeguard.

To turn the matter on its head, as the amendments suggest, and put the onus elsewhere before proceedings commenced would, in the vast majority of cases, be unnecessary and complicated. We are concerned that, where dual criminality is shown—where offences are committed in this country that are unacceptable in our criminal law—we should be able to act against the people responsible in a speedy but just manner.

I have heard what other of my hon. Friends have said. I believe that they are right to have concerns. The safeguards built into the Bill, coupled with the criminal law in this country, should be enough to placate those fears. For that reason, the Government cannot support the amendments.

Mr. Leigh: With the leave of the House, I should like to make a few more remarks. It is probably a great mistake to start reading Bills too carefully. The more one reads them, the more worried one becomes. I am still not entirely satisfied.

It is clear to me that we have two debates running side by side. We all know that the Government are primarily concerned with pursuing football hooligans, paedophiles and criminals plotting international crime. For that reason, they do not want to put enormous burdens on the Attorney-General or the prosecution by requiring them to prove dual criminality, as my amendment would require them to do. We all accept that. There is no problem with that.

What I, my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes, North–East (Mr. Butler) and for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) are worried about is those other cases. That is where the Bill falls short. The more we debate the matter, the more the Bill falls short on those other cases. I suspect that the other place, which is staffed by people of far greater legal distinction than me or my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North–East—well, perhaps not my hon. Friend—may well start to look at the Bill with a jaundiced eye.

The speech of the hon. Member for Hillhead, who has great knowledge of the middle east, was interesting. The example that he adduced of the Golan heights was pertinent. A group plots in this country to plant a bomb in protest at the Israeli occupation of the Golan heights. That is an offence under British law and under Israeli law, but not under Syrian law. But our Foreign Office does not recognise the sovereignty of Israel over the Golan heights. If ever there was a difficult issue, that is it. It would tax even my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney–General, with all his legal skill. It would certainly tax the CPS. That makes it clear that amendments to be debated later should be considered seriously by the Government and by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne, the promoter of the Bill. It also proves that there is a lot in my amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne worried me. I am talking about political and terrorist offences now, not simple football hooliganism-type offences. My hon. Friend said that there was an implicit assumption that the dual criminality test is satisfied. We are talking about political offences and state trials. Is it right that we should frame legislation based on an implicit assumption that the dual criminality test is met when an offence is committed abroad? The hon. Member for Hillhead spoke knowledgeably about the complexities of Islamic law. Virtually nothing is written down. These are hugely complex matters. Now my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne says that the matter should be at the discretion of the court. Why should it? The prosecution brings the action. It must prove that the act is an offence here and abroad. That is the purpose of my amendment. This is British justice.

I do not intend to press the amendment, but we have had an interesting debate and serious questions have been asked. Before the Bill proceeds to become an Act of Parliament, I hope that my hon. Friend will think again, but for now I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Michael: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 2, line 39, at end insert—

'(12A) No prosecution in respect of conspiracy to commit an offence to which subsection (12B) applies shall be instituted by virtue of this section except by or with the consent of the Attorney General.

(12B) This subsection applies to any offence listed in an order made by the Secretary of State by statutory instrument.

(12C) A statutory instrument made under subsection (12B) above shall be subject by approval by resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 6, in page 3, line 9, at end insert—

'Attorney General Attorney General for Northern Ireland.'.

No. 8, in clause 2, page 3, line 45, at end insert—

'(8A) No prosecution for incitement to commit an offence to which subsection (8B) applies shall be instituted by virtue of this section except by or with the consent—

(a) in England and Wales, of the Attorney General; or

(b) in Northern Ireland, of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland.

(8B) This subsection applies to any offence listed in an order made by the Secretary of State by statutory instrument.

(8C) A statutory instrument made under subsection (8B) above shall be subject by approval by resolution of each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Michael: Amendment No. 4 would create a mechanism to allow a distinction to be drawn between the prosecution of those involved in some pretty horrific activities such as child sex abuse abroad, racial violence, anti-semitism or activities of the mafia, and the prosecution of those who are supporting a fight for freedom and justice in another country. That is an important distinction, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have made clear in the debates from Second Reading onwards. The mechanism in the amendment of a list and the approval of the Attorney-General would, for example, allow the prosecution of paedophiles engaging in overseas activity to go ahead without approval, but would require approval in some of the more sensitive cases referred to by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The list may, of course, include terrorist offences, although they are dealt with more specifically under amendment No. 5.

Support for the Bill has come from the Government and the Opposition, but we have both also expressed concern about key areas of it. Last year, it was Ministers who wanted to proceed with caution when we wanted to pursue those guilty of child sex abuse. Now, there seems to have been a leap to the opposite end of the spectrum, because the Bill relates to absolutely all offences. I understand why the hon. Member for Eastbourne has approached it in that direction, but the price we must pay for allowing such wide-ranging legislation is to ensure that there is a mechanism to protect against its misuse. That is why the amendments address issues that have been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and why there should be the same unanimity about trying to get the balance right as there has been in offering general support for the Bill.

In Committee, the need for balance was acknowledged given the wide scope for action under the Bill. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) suggested in Committee that the Bill had been drawn widely, but, as I said then, I believe that it has been drawn without limits. I understand that the intention behind that is to avoid spurious challenges, needless delay and obstructive nit-picking by those who are able to employ the best lawyers but who may be the most serious enemies of civilised society. I entirely accept that intention behind the Bill, but it is important that we appreciate today that we must balance the scope of the Bill with a mechanism to ensure that its powers cannot be used malevolently or with bad judgment with results that go beyond Parliament's intentions.

11.30 am

The mechanism requiring the Attorney-General to act as the guardian at the gate of prosecution—not as a Minister, but in his role as a Law Officer—is not perfect, but at least that addresses some of the important issues that have been raised by hon. Members. As I pointed out in Committee, there is a separate problem in Scotland because under Scots law all prosecutions are commenced under the name and authority of the Lord Advocate. In practice, however, the decision will be taken by a procurator fiscal. There is no assurance that the approval of the Lord Advocate would be required in cases that arise as a consequence of the Bill. I do not have an answer to that, although the Minister acknowledged in Committee that I had attempted to discuss it. If the Minister is unwilling to accept the mechanism that I have offered today, I hope that he will acknowledge that a suitable mechanism needs to be found

As I said about amendment No. 1, the amendments are not perfect. They were drawn up following our debates in Committee on Tuesday and Wednesday and they had to be tabled on the very day the Committee reported so that they could be discussed today. I do not claim to have the capacity to table perfect amendments within such a short time. I hope that the Minister will accept, however, that my amendments represent an honest attempt to introduce a mechanism to address the problems that have been highlighted.

The clear intention of the Bill is to address a gap in the law that prevents prosecution in the United Kingdom of those who conspire to cause violence abroad. The very nature of the offences with which we are dealing means that difficult cases will arise, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and I said in Committee. There are also cases of conspiracy to commit violence abroad, such as racial violence and acts of anti-semitism, which have nothing to do with freedom or the search for justice. Organised violence has been committed under the cloak of football and other international events.

The Bill may be used to target those who promote or pursue other serious organised criminal activities including drug trafficking, major fraud and disorder. The consequences of organised violence and trafficking in drugs, which is conducted as a result of international conspiracy, leads down to the streets of our constituencies—the cities, towns and villages of the United Kingdom. There are serious links between some of the activities that the Bill is intended to hit and the well-being of our constituents. I am sure that the Minister and the hon. Member for Eastbourne would agree that such activities should be our target, but we should not target or silence those involved in legitimate political activity while living in exile.

It is inevitable that decisions will have to be made on difficult cases. That is why we want the Attorney-General to exercise an oversight of prosecutions. Perhaps the Minister can offer an even better solution, because I acknowledge, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead, that our amendments are not perfect. They are designed, however, to strike a balance on the exercise of the powers in the Bill. We must be able to prosecute some of those who everyone agrees should be prosecuted—the elephants on the doorstep, as I described them earlier—but we must ensure that those powers are not used in a way unintended by Parliament. It is difficult to achieve a balance between pursuing those who undermine liberty and democracy and protecting those concepts in other cases. It is a great challenge to hon. Members to find that balance.

It is impossible to predict future cases that may cause concern, but I should like to remind the House of two examples that have already been cited in order to clarify what should and should not be the purposes of Parliament when it passes the Bill.

In Committee, I referred to the example of Mandela in similar terms to those used by my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead today. During the apartheid years many

people in this country were involved in the anti-apartheid movement. We are proud to have been involved in activities in support of those who were seeking to overthrow the apartheid regime. As my hon. Friend said, the importance of that movement was underlined by President Mandela when he spoke so movingly to both Houses of Parliament last year.

There was a wide-ranging alliance of opponents to apartheid which included those who planned violence, those who condoned some acts of sabotage short of putting people in danger and those who advocated non-violent action. If I understand him correctly, the Minister confirmed earlier that it is not the Government's intention that the Bill should be used in a similar case to target those who neither advocated nor planned violence or were directly involved in it simply because they were associated with such a broad alliance. The purpose of the amendments is to question how we can ensure that the intentions of Parliament are not exceeded in the future.

Secondly, I should like to refer to Somaliland. I was a community worker in an area with one of the biggest Somali communities in the country so I was particularly aware of that country before coming to the House. Most British Somalis come from the former British Somaliland and most settled here after service in the British Army, Navy or merchant navy. Their service was enormously important during the second world war and as recently as the Falklands war and the Gulf war.

During the 1980s, the people of north-west Somalia, what was British Somaliland and is now known as the Republic of Somaliland, were the victims of an atrocious period of civil rights abuse, under the regime of the then President Siad Barre. It was described as a hidden war. It long predated the public war when the opposition to the regime of Siad Barre spread to the south and Mogadishu. The earlier hidden war, which affected the families and friends of British Somalis, was not in the public view because the television cameras were not present. I regret to say that the international community and Britain ignored the human rights abuses that were committed then.

The Somali National Movement defended the rights of the families and relatives of the British Somalis and was also engaged in a civil war against the Government of Somalia. Would people in the United Kingdom who sent money and medical supplies to the north of Somalia have been caught by the Bill? Is that the intention of the Bill? As I understand it, it clearly is not. It will help to clarify Parliament's intention if we can be clear on that point, and it will help if the Minister will agree that we require safeguards to ensure that the powers provided by the Bill are not used to hit those types of target.

The point has already been made by hon. Members on both sides the House—it was also made very strongly by Liberty in its briefing—that incitement is a particularly elastic concept. Would it be incitement for an opponent of the Iraqi regime to write a newspaper article in the UK calling for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein? We may not even have to consider the examples given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead of those with even greater enthusiasm to realise that a line must be drawn.

I understand why the Bill has been drafted so widely, but it is important that there are mechanisms to ensure that those wide-ranging powers are used to serve the purpose intended by Parliament and not for others. That is why it is important that the issues are put on the record. I hope that the Minister will express his strongest and clearest agreement with the principles on how the legislation should operate. Under the Pepper *v.* Hart ruling, a clear statement will be very helpful.

Hon. Members have given many examples of how the legislation could operate. My hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead made his point by referring to various countries. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East referred to the situation in Kashmir and to those in different parts of Africa. The two examples that I gave, however, demonstrate the difficult judgments that will have to be made under the Bill's provisions. Those provisions must be used with sensitivity.

Judgments will first have to be made at a senior level, where Parliament's intentions are understood and appreciated, rather than at a more administrative level. Conversely, we must limit the possibility of powers being used way beyond Parliament's intentions. I believe that the mechanism requiring review by the Attorney-General of the specific offence of terrorism will be of particular value in ensuring that the scrutiny which Parliament expects will occur.

Sir Russell Johnston: I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) has said. However, in my long years in the House, one thing that I have learnt is that Ministers' assurances that Parliament's intentions are this, that or the other become worthless after a Bill becomes law.

Mr. Michael: I understand that point, which is why I mentioned the case of Pepper *v.* Hart, in which it was said that Parliament's intentions as expressed on the Floor of the House can be considered. I think that that is an important starting point in clarifying Parliament's intentions. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman, which is why I think that we need a mechanism to ensure that the intentions expressed on the Floor of the House are considered at a specific point. In our amendments, we have suggested that it should be clear that the buck stops on the desk of the Attorney-General in interpreting Parliament's intention. Therefore, decisions cannot be taken by accident because—in Scotland, for example—they have been taken by the procurator fiscal or by someone in the Crown Prosecution Service, in which, even at the top levels, there may not be total confidence that they are taking the right judgment. That is why it is important that we have a mechanism.

I do not pretend that our amendments are the final word on the issue. I hope that the Minister will at least acknowledge the intentions behind this group of amendments, and that he shares my concern that an appropriate mechanism should be established before the Bill becomes an Act. Protection should be created, and everyone should be quite clear on the intentions behind the Bill and on what should be done. If we are to enact a Bill that rightly, and with our support, attempts to tackle the real evil of international violence and terrorism, we must be clear and avoid unintentional consequences. We can then deal with those acts that we all agree cannot be condoned, and which British justice can pursue.

Mr. Kirkhope: I have listened with great interest to the comments in this debate of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), as has my hon.

[Mr. Kirkhope]

Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). My hon. Friend will no doubt wish to reply. The Government have been very concerned about the comments made by my hon. Friend—who is promoting the Bill—by the hon. Gentleman and by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). The Bill deals with a difficult issue. In Committee, we had a very full debate on the necessity of a provision requiring the Attorney-General's consent for prosecution under the legislation.

The Bill is obviously and necessarily widely drafted. The conduct that it would embrace ranges from planning by paedophiles and football hooliganism to criminals who organise from within the UK offences that may be committed abroad. It also embraces that category of cases identified by hon. Members in this debate, in which the prosecution's decision will involve public policy considerations in sensitive areas. I think that it is common ground that such cases must be considered not only at a very high level but by a person with the requisite understanding and experience of the issues involved. In Committee, there was a difference of view about who should have oversight, but the point was debated fully.

11.45 am

I do not believe that it is necessary that every case brought for prosecution under the legislation must be considered by the Attorney-General, simply to ensure that no highly sensitive cases escape his notice. Nevertheless, I have spoken to the Attorney-General, and he has considered, with the Director of Public Prosecutions, the issue very carefully. I am able to inform the House that, on the authority of the Attorney-General, the Director of Public Prosecutions proposes to issue a standing instruction which will stipulate the level at which all cases under this legislation must be considered. It will be supplemented by a further requirement that any such case which gives rise to issues of public policy touching on a sensitive area, such as international relations, shall be drawn to the attention of the director, with a clear view to consultation between the director and the Attorney-General.

Consultation between the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Attorney-General in relation to sensitive cases is an integral part of the superintendence relationship provided for under the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, to which we referred in Committee. The Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland would put in place similar arrangements.

Those proposals perhaps do not quite go to the lengths of the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth and other hon. Members, but I think that they are a very positive set of proposals and have been promptly made.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the Minister for his comments. He is making it clear that he listened to what was said in Committee. However, I should like to be clear on his proposals. He has mentioned and outlined a mechanism. Will the strength of his proposals be based on a requirement rather than on advice, and will he advise his colleagues in another place to ensure that the mechanism is included in the legislation, through amendments tabled in another place?

Mr. Kirkhope: As I think we have been reminded several times today, there has been a comparatively short time between the stages in the Bill's passage. We have yet to work out the precise and most practical mechanisms. However, I think that my remarks have made it fairly clear which route we think we can and should follow. No doubt the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne thought that I would come empty handed today, but I have not. I believe that our proposals can well be put into practice in a manner that will effectively deal with some of the concerns that have been expressed. I know that hon. Members have said in this debate that Ministers give assurances which are as nothing as time goes on. I do not give assurances lightly, and I will personally ensure that the matters progress—hopefully to satisfy hon. Members.

Mr. Galloway: One is grateful for small mercies and that sounds, on the face of it, like a small mercy, but, as even the Minister has acknowledged, the lack of clarity—the necessary lack of clarity given the lateness of the hour of the statement being lobbed into the debate—again highlights what I said earlier: the unseemly haste with which the Bill is being rushed through means that mistakes might be made. The small mercies being thrown on the table may or may not be as they appear, and may or may not have the quality to which the Minister attests. I have no doubt that the matter will be fully tested in another place.

I am not sure whether the elevation of the decision to prosecute to ministerial level—if that is what the Minister was saying; it is certainly what my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth is proposing in the amendment—is a good or a bad thing. The position of Attorney-General is a political appointment. The Attorney-General is a member of the Cabinet and of a political party. He is a partisan political figure, not some august God-like legal figure far removed from down and dirty politicians like us. As we have seen in recent years, Attorney-Generals are often taken down dark alleyways by their political colleagues—alleyways which they perhaps wish they had not gone down and which lead to all sorts of nasty accidents that later leap up and bite them. I am therefore worried that the proposed move might not necessarily be a good thing. Like a Government, an Attorney-General is here today and gone tomorrow. That means that the tests applied are necessarily subjective and ever changing.

Some years ago, I had the privilege to go to Saudi Arabia as part of a delegation from the House. I was with a group of people who turned out to be very distinguished—myself excepted of course. On the delegation was the now Government Chief Whip. He then held no position, although I was able to see his sagacity long before the Prime Minister did.

The delegation was very ably led by Lord Pym, the former Foreign Secretary. I forget which one it was, but there had been a recent squall in British-Saudi relations. The al-Yamamah II mega arms deal was in the pipeline, and billions of pounds of work and profits and many jobs were at stake, so it was thought that the ruffled feathers of the Saudi Arabian Government had to be smoothed.

As those who were in the House with him will recall, Lord Pym is an Englishman of a certain type. He is an old-school gentleman, a real gent. All the diplomatic skills that he had acquired over the years were put to use by that delegation when we met all the luminaries of the Saudi Arabian state. Each and every one of those luminaries made the same complaint to Lord Pym, namely about media misrepresentation, as they put it, of Saudi policy and the Saudi legal system. The gripe that was current at the time was the decision to broadcast in this country the documentary "Death of a Princess", which sensationalised some of the horrors of the Saudi legal system.

Before the first meeting, Lord Pym briefed us in the following terms—I am paraphrasing but I think accurately—"We are here to soft-soap but we can never apologise." With great aplomb, sophistication and savoir faire, Lord Pym soft-soaped but did not apologise. Whenever he was asked why Britain did not prosecute this or that person for this or that slight against Saudi Arabia, he replied—it seemed to be a great strength to him—that politicians had nothing to do with such decisions. He said that our legal system was separate from the Executive and that politicians did not decide who should be prosecuted or not. I was then a young Member of Parliament and it seemed to me a great strength—probably also a good excuse—that Lord Pym could say that then. To some extent, the Government recently said the same thing during the al-Masari period. They were able to say that al-Masari was not committing any breaches of British law and although they despised and detested him, they could not invent reasons to prosecute him.

We shall no longer have that excuse if we accept the amendment or what appears to be a concession from the Minister. If we accept the amendment and the apparent concession, the decision about which cases to proceed with will be a political decision made with the state's interest, as it is perceived at a particular time, in mind. It will therefore have less to do with justice and more to do with politics; it will be more subjective than objective. It will not be a test of whether an offence has been committed but of whether the Attorney-General of the day thinks that an offence should be proceeded against. That will lead us down some tortuous byways because Governments, and even policies within Governments, change. I repeat the example that I cited earlier.

There was time when Saddam Hussein's Government were most valued customers and warmly treated. If they were not allies, they were very special customers. Ministers without number made trips without number to sit on his sofa and try to sell him military hardware. British business delegations were constantly going over there while people like me were demonstrating outside the embassy in London on the side of the victims of the Saddam dictatorship.

That has all changed: the decision about what it would have been right to proceed against according to the judgment of an Attorney-General at that time would be different from the decision taken today. There is no chance of the Iraqi opposition today being prosecuted for plotting the violent overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Similarly, had the Bill been law then, there would have every chance that those plotting the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and who were acting against a Government with which our Government had warm and profitable relations, might well have been proceeded against because they were then, as others are now, seeking the violent overthrow of that regime. That regime has not changed but the policy of the British Government—the same British Government—has. The powers that would be given to the Attorney-General under the amendments or the alternative that goes some way towards that, which the Minister seemed to offer us, are of doubtful value in improving the justice of the Bill.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) has missed the point about the Attorney-General with his examples of cases in which the United Kingdom chose not to prosecute. The issue is not whether there is evidence—the subject of the examples that the hon. Gentleman gave—but whether, there being evidence, it is in the national interest for a prosecution to proceed. It is in those circumstances that powers are given to the Attorney-General. The latest edition of "Blackstone's Criminal Practice" sets out the situation concisely on page 935. It says:

> "In general, the Attorney's consent is required where issues of public policy, national security or relations with other countries may affect the decision whether to prosecute. An example is the Suppression of Terrorism Act 1978 . . . by which he must sanction any proceedings here for terrorist offences allegedly committed in a convention country. Other examples are offences of bribery under the Public Bodies Corrupt Practices Act 1889 or Prevention of Corruption Act 1906 . . . offences under the Official Secrets Act 1911"—

or offences

> "contrary to part III of the Public Order Act 1986 . . . offences of belonging to a prescribed organisation, contributing money to prescribed organisations"

and other examples. It is clear that the purpose of the Attorney-General's consent is to decide where, as a matter of public policy, a prosecution ought to proceed if it may not be in the interests of the United Kingdom to permit it.

12 noon

Mr. Kirkhope: I do not know whether my hon. and learned Friend was in his place a few minutes ago, when I made clear a proposal in regard to the Attorney-General and the Director of Public Prosecutions in future consideration of matters that arise from the Bill in the area that he is discussing.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: If my hon. Friend has conceded the point that was made in Committee, I am grateful and I apologise for detaining the House unnecessarily even for a minute or two.

Mr. Kirkhope: It is difficult for me to go back over that ground. I have not conceded the precise nature of the amendments, but I have said that we want a mechanism put in place to ensure greater scrutiny, particularly for sensitive matters and matters that may be in the area of public policy. We want that put on a clearer basis. I have put that clearly on the record this morning. Our proposal does not fit the amendments precisely, but it recognises the contributions in Committee of my hon. and learned Friend and other hon. Members who wanted us to make such provisions to allay their fears and concerns.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am grateful for that. I trust my hon. Friend and his advisers to come up with a form that responds reasonably to our concerns. I apologise for having taken the House's time.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I apologise to the House for arriving late. I have been to and from my

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

constituency. I understand that the Minister has made it clear that the Government have moved, recognising that the points raised on Second Reading and in Committee are points of substance. We accepted from the start that the Bill was necessary, but that safeguards were needed. We shall give the Bill a fair passage and we hope that the Government will move towards the points relating to sensitive matters that we have raised.

I pay tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) for suggesting a formula and for raising some interesting examples of ways in which things might go wrong. His Afghan example was particularly apposite. A private individual can normally raise an issue without the consent of the Attorney-General. A private prosecution might have been made against our former Prime Minister because of her collusion with certain Afghan rebels against the then established Afghan Government during the mid-1980s.

I shall not detain the House. I welcome the Minister's undertaking that he and his advisers—as well as the promoter of the Bill, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), whom I congratulate again—have recognised that a problem exists. I look forward to finding out how they will address it.

Mr. Waterson: I am entitled to be brief in responding to the debate for two reasons. First, we have had positive and detailed debates on the issue on Second Reading, in Committee and today. I am delighted to see my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) and the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) in their places. Both of them have been admirably persistent and persuasive on this topic. The second reason is my hon. Friend the Minister's announcement, which I very much welcome. The Government have clearly listened to the arguments deployed at various stages and they have come up with a positive solution to the concerns expressed.

I want to add just two other points on which I have touched in previous debates on the subject. I give the House a general reminder that for many years, the Attorney-General has had the power to intervene in any prosecution in this country under the nolle prosequi procedure. In addition, there are already certain substantive offences on the statute book which specifically require the consent of the Attorney-General. Under the Bill, the same requirement would apply to offences of conspiracy and incitement relating to those substantive offences. Those offences include issues of special sensitivity, one example being the Official Secrets Act 1911.

I commend my hon. Friend the Minister for his announcement and invite the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) to seek leave to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Michael: I thank the Minister for responding positively to the concerns expressed in Committee and today. He is wise to do so and wise to have left open the possibility of inserting into the Bill, by amendment in the other place, the mechanism to which he referred. He did not actually say that that would happen, but he did not close the door on the matter.

We recognise that the Minister's response has been genuine and sincere. I am sure that he will ensure that his undertaking is followed through. I am also certain that intentions expressed in this House are of some value, but, as the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) said, they do not have the same force as legislation.

The power of the Attorney-General to intervene when he feels like it, to which the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred, is not enough. We need a mechanism in place that guarantees the Attorney-General's oversight and ensures that the Bill is used only against the targets that it is intended to deal with.

I hope that the Minister accepts that we appreciate that he has moved swiftly to try to address the concerns expressed by hon. Members on both sides. I pay tribute to the fact that he has been willing to listen to hon. Members. That says a lot for him and is an example of the House of Commons acting as it should. I hope, however, that he is aware of our strong belief that the mechanism to provide a safeguard which he offers should be included in the Bill. That is beyond our scope to address today, but the Minister will have read our suggestion, which is included in another group of amendments concerning terrorism. I know that he will continue to think about these matters.

I offer the Minister our co-operation in trying to tease these matters out. We are always willing to help the Government, as he knows—

Mr. Kirkhope: For about the fourth time during the passage of the Bill, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that it is not a question of teasing anything out of me. I do not like that phrase and I wonder whether he would desist from using it.

Mr. Michael: I apologise if I have teased the Minister. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) suggested that I was seeking to terrorise the Minister. I seek simply to help to achieve an effective measure that contains the safeguards that are required. It is not the Minister's mind or his intentions that need teasing out, but effective, clear legislation. I hope that the Minister will not feel so sensitive to that way of expressing it. The Bill needs a safeguard to balance the completely open range of offences that it seeks to address by making sure that it cannot be misused or abused.

Given the Minister's willingness to consider further, we welcome the Bill, but in a limited way. Although we should like some amendments to be made in another place, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Waterson.]*

12.11 pm

Mr. Galloway: I oppose the Third Reading of the Bill. As I said earlier, I shall not attempt to talk the measure out. It is clear that I am alone in opposing it in principle and as a democrat I shall have to accept the consequences of that when we divide.

I was unable to attend the debate on Second Reading as I was out of the country. However, as I have been on my feet for a good part of this morning and I hope that I have registered some important points that have been acknowledged by hon. Members on both sides of the House and may well be picked up elsewhere, I shall confine myself to stating relatively briefly my opposition in principle.

Of course there is complete consensus about the need to hunt down paedophiles, football hooligans and other criminals and deal rigorously with them. I hope that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) will accept that those of us who are anxious about the political dimensions of the Bill are genuinely concerned about liberty. There have been long discussions on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report, but the nub of the problem remains the same—the definition of terrorism and the proper appreciation of our state's interest in deciding whether to pursue people held to be involved in inciting others to commit acts of terrorism.

On Second Reading, a number of hon. Members restated their position and said, as the Minister has today, that they were against all violence for any political end at any time. I am not—and I do not believe that in their heart of hearts they are either. Each one of them would oppose occupation and oppression ever they came to our land: they would fight them on the beaches, they would fight them in the streets, they would fight them on the rooftops and from house to house and would never surrender their liberty. Precisely that evil has occurred in other countries, where good men and women have been ready to resist tyranny and determined to resist the assertion of what was called on Second Reading the divine right of kings. A Government being established, recognised and lawful does not mean that the country has any democratic validity. The country may, as many do, be pursuing appalling acts of tyranny against its own citizens such that some of them flee abroad, often—to our credit—to this country because of the high standards of liberty that it has historically enjoyed.

I gave examples, as have others, of people such as Kossuth and Marx in the 19th century, as well as many more without number—I could spend the rest of the day reciting their names—who came here because this was a land where liberty had been won, freedoms gained and in which there was democratic space to organise, incite, and even conspire to overthrow the tyrannies that afflicted their countries.

By definition, a tyranny can be removed only by extraordinary measures. It is sometimes possible, although very rare, that massive civil disobedience and huge demonstrations can topple a regime, as some in eastern Europe were toppled, but much more often at one stage or another during a dictatorship, people have to bear arms and take armed action against it.

Inevitably, in conditions of extreme repression, the leadership of such movements will gravitate to countries such as ours where freedom and liberty prevail. The Bill will criminalise such people, even though they have not broken any law in Britain—or at least they would not have done so until the Bill became law—or caused any harm to the Queen's peace in her realm. They will fall open to prosecution in this country under the Bill because they are inciting, supporting or organising events in distant tyrannies, which are clearly offences under the laws of such distant tyrannies.

Such circumstances will lead us down some very dark pathways. I insist that, given the Conservative majority and the prevailing mentality at the time, the Bill would have led to the prosecution of Nelson Mandela. Only in recent years would he have been free from the threat of prosecution by the Attorney-General, the Director of Public Prosecutions or whoever was making the decision. Many other people today, some of whom are approved by me and some of whom are approved by Conservative Members, would be similarly affected.

I restate the cliché, which is a cliché only because it is so obviously true, that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Makarios was a wanted terrorist and took tea with the Queen in Buckingham palace. Mugabe was a wanted Marxist Leninist terrorist and then took tea with the Queen at Buckingham palace. One could give example after example of such people. Yasser Arafat was referred to earlier. Until very recently, he was routinely described as a terrorist leader. I never believed that—I was with him always, but that was not the case for the majority of Members. Yet last year and the year before that he sat with his distinctive chequered headdress up in the Gallery as an honoured guest in the House of Commons. The definitions of terrorist and freedom fighter are constantly changing and we will be asking for trouble if we proceed with the Bill.

The Bill itself might disturb the Queen's peace. I gave an example earlier, which I will now develop. In this country, there are 580,000 Pakistani Kashmiri Muslims. Every man and woman among them supports what they call the freedom struggle in occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Today, in mosques up and down the country, people will be collecting money for the jihad—the holy war. That money will make its way to Srinagar and the coffers of the liberation movement. If the Bill became law, those people would be committing an offence every time they did that. Will they be prosecuted? India will demand that they are. India will say that we now have a law that would allow us to proceed against people who are inciting and helping to organise acts of terrorism in Kashmir. India will press the Foreign Office, and our ambassador in Delhi will be upbraided for any failure to prosecute the hive of terrorists—as India perceives them—who support such activities.

Will our Attorney-General agree to a prosecution? If he does, what will be the response of the Pakistani and Kashmiri communities in this country? Will they welcome the criminalisation of their brethren? Will they support a prosecution of their co-religionists who are British citizens? We can be sure that they will not. They will take grave exception. They might demonstrate and even burn an effigy or a flag. The demonstration might get out of hand and the police might deal with it injudiciously. Civil disorder might break out in our country because of a cack-handed prosecution of political activists at the behest of a foreign state.

The Under-Secretary may argue that, although we have important trading and economic interests with India, it would be unlikely to be able to push us into taking such

[Mr. Galloway]

a prosecution, but Saudi Arabia was able to put enormous pressure on the British Government to crack down on the activities of Dr. al-Masari and other Saudi dissidents in Britain. I recognise and acknowledge the Government's motives: they wished to protect jobs, industry and profits. Only a fool would deny that those are important factors, but I believe that the Government are supporting the Bill as a direct result of their inability to deal with the al-Masari affair. The Government were unable to silence him or kick him out to a remote Windward island.

The Bill has been hurried through with such unseemly haste that the Opposition and the Government have been unable to carry out their duties. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth has been unable properly to table amendments and the Minister has been unable properly to inform us of the concession that he has made: it sounded different each time he explained it, so until we read *Hansard* we shall not know what we are being asked to accept. That is indecent and unseemly haste, at the behest of a foreign Government—indeed, a foreign tyranny with no elections, no democratic system and no proper legal system.

The Bill would open us up to pressure from every tinpot dictatorship around the globe asking why we are not using the legislation to prosecute Mr. X or Mr. Y, who is in London busily plotting the overthrow of the dictatorship. We shall be asked, "Why did you prosecute Mr. X when you will not prosecute Mr. Y? Is it because Mr. X's country of origin is more important than Mr. Y's?" India will ask, "Why are you prepared to prosecute Saudi dissidents but not Kashmiri activists fomenting armed revolution in our territory?" What will the Government's answer be?

This country's freedoms did not fall from the sky. They were won by great reformers and great parliamentarians. Great movements of people created the measures of freedom and democracy that we enjoy here today. It is entirely wrong that a substantial reduction and diminution in those freedoms should be made in such a thinly attended House. At 9.40 this morning, if I had managed to find just one more teller, I would have won the Division. There would not have been 40 Members in the House to support the Government's business today. For the lack of one teller, I could not put that to the test—although by the time the Division was called off there were only 10 Members on the Government side of the House and only two on the Opposition side, one of whom was myself. That is how thinly attended the House has been in considering this important measure which has been rushed through.

The Committee stage finished on Wednesday, and we are having Third Reading on Friday, with no time for hon. Members to do their duty properly. It would be entirely wrong for the House to give away in such a desultory, haphazard and ill-considered manner a substantial measure of our ancient freedoms, which this great Parliament has won and developed over the years.

12.26 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): This is an issue of some concern to me, as our country now increasingly has to face its international responsibilities. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) that I am not sure that when the Kashmiris in my constituency contribute money to the campaign for human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir, they do so in the direct knowledge or belief that they are contributing to terrorist activities. My impression of the strong and passionate commitment in Rotherham to the Kashmiri cause is that people want an end to terrorism and violence of any sort.

Mr. Galloway: My hon. Friend takes a close interest in such affairs. Has he heard of the jihad fund? Does he know what the word "jihad" means? It means holy war. In every mosque in every town and city in this country, there is a collection every Friday for that fund, which goes to support the liberation movements in occupied Kashmir. Of course, people want an end to the violence, but until Indian occupation ends, they are prepared to support the counter-violence of their compatriots.

Mr. MacShane: I do know what jihad means, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me. Of course there are many funds with aggressive and warlike historic names attached to them, but I do not believe that my Kashmiri constituents support or want their money to go to any kind of armed violence.

I do not want to enter a debate about Kashmir now, because what is at stake is the wider issue of the need to address international responsibilities in a world that is losing the strength of its frontiers. As I look round the world, I see many examples of cases in which the Government should not flinch from the need to prosecute and to demand justice—and, yes, sometimes the need to stay the hand of those who support terrorist violence.

Abominable crimes have been committed in Albania, including the assassination of a wonderful trade union leader two weeks ago by Islamic fundamentalists, who allegedly derive their funding and support from London. Many people in this country are making a fortune from trading with states that turn a blind eye to terrorism. Iran announced recently that it is not prepared formally to withdraw the fatwa issued for the execution of Salman Rushdie. The Government must send a message that we are prepared to deal with the problems of international terrorism and crime. It is not enough for people simply to move offshore or to raise the banner of political activism: if their activities are linked to terrorism or other violence, I would have no compunction in seeing the force of law employed against them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead will know, London is the destination for a great deal of Russian mafia money. This modest measure is necessary if we are to tackle the problem of international crime.

Much outrage was expressed this week against the gangster state of Albania. Its President, who encouraged the selling of pyramid schemes that have led to the ruination of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Albanians, is the political godson of our Prime Minister. President Sali Berisha has appeared at Conservative party conferences with the Prime Minister, and his Democratic party is now widely regarded as a gangster organisation, with links to arms smuggling and arms deals with Rwanda and Afghanistan, to drug dealing and to the smuggling of historical artefacts from Albanian national museums. That gangster state and its President have strong links with, and the patronage of, the Conservative party. I refer hon. Members to early-day motion 535, standing in my name

and that of several other hon. Members, which gives further details of the criminal activities of the Albanian regime and its links with London.

I put it to my hon. Friend that when some future public inquiry, chaired by someone with the authority of Sir Richard Scott, examines the behaviour of the gangster state of Albania and its political support in this country, there may be a case for bringing prosecutions using this legislation if it passes into law. My hon. Friend is right to address the important question of preserving the right to political protest and our country's tradition of offering sanctuary to those who are fleeing persecution from oppressive regimes. However, we must make a clear distinction between political opposition and supporting and endorsing violence.

We must recognise also that there will be accounts to settle in future, deriving from the corrupt behaviour of elements of the political class in our country, who may flee our shores and seek exile elsewhere. The long arm of British law should not be prevented from bringing them to justice.

12.33 pm

Sir Russell Johnston: I had not intended to speak in the debate, but feel that I should make a brief contribution. It seems clear that the general intention of the Bill is laudable, certainly within the area of criminality—the area of political activism is much more problematic. What I have heard loud and clear, however, is that the Bill is cast in an unsatisfactory way.

The amendments proposed by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) were evidently substantial and it was obvious that he continued to believe them to be so, even as he withdrew them. It is against the tradition of the legal systems throughout this country—in England and Wales and in Scotland—that matters are in any way tilted in favour of the prosecution.

The legislation is important and it is clear that it has been rushed. Circumstances sometimes require that things be rushed—I do not deny that—but I am not sure whether that is so in this case and because the Bill has been rushed, it could produce injustice, which is something that we must be most concerned to avoid. The earnest—I do not use the word unflatteringly—and fairly expressed worries of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman reflected that. As I said in an intervention in his speech, whatever assurances the Minister may give about the way in which the Bill might be operated when it becomes an Act, once an Act is an Act, it is on its own and it is left to the legal system to interpret it.

I was impressed by many of the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway). I think that he might concede that many of those matters were always and will always be the subject of political morality judgments, but I should be very concerned if there were truth in his allegation that the al-Masari case was the genesis for this legislation. I hope that the Minister will make it clear in his reply that it is not. When the hon. Member for Hillhead told us, rather amusingly, about his experience with Lord Pym and the incident of the television programme about the princess, which was current at the time, he made it clear that Lord Pym would not have that defence if a delegation were to go to Saudi Arabia in similar circumstances after the Bill became law. I do not think that that is a good route for us to take. Consequently, the Attorney-General clearly will be involved in making decisions about problems that he did not previously have to deal with, which means the greater politicisation of the legal system.

I am told by some that the other place is more contemplative than we are. I hope that its Members will contemplate with great care and judiciousness when the Bill reaches them.

12.38 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson: The role of Parliament is not to be a rubber stamp for the Executive. Our task is to view legislation that has been drafted by the Executive and to question and improve it.

The course of the Bill from the time when it reached the House is a good example of the Executive being questioned, and the Bill might be improved. I say might because we have but an undertaking from the Minister, which has yet to be put in legislative form and tabled in the other place. I suspect that had he not made a concession, the Bill would not have gone through easily in the other place, with its history—particularly recently—of standing for our traditions and against the Government, who may try to steamroller measures through, especially as one approaches an election. The approach to an election is not a good time to speak for civil liberties, particularly with the present Home Secretary.

The Home Office drafted the Bill without adequate safeguards for civil liberties. I was surprised, when I saw the terms of the Bill, that the organisations that seek to preserve our traditions and speak on behalf of civil liberties had not woken up to its implications. That might be partially excused by the fact that, at first sight, the Bill appears wholly innocuous and only on closer examination do some of the graver implications become clear.

I and other hon. Members raised those issues on Second Reading, citing the example of what might have happened to Nelson Mandela in the early 1960s had he sought refuge in this country. I also referred to the question of sensitive communities in this country, which quite properly protest against perceived injustices abroad.

I share some of the misgivings that have been expressed about the haste of the legislation, but that is understandable, because there is limited time for private Members' legislation, the Home Office chose not to introduce the Bill as a Government Bill earlier in the Session, and we are on the threshold of a general election.

I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and recognise the strength of the case that he made as a spokesman for Liberty, reflecting our strong traditions in such matters, but I cannot accept his absolutist approach that all oppositions, whatever they may do in this country in preparation for an offence abroad, whether they be Algerian fundamentalists or the African National Congress in the 1960s, must by the very fact of being called oppositions be immune from prosecution here. There is a dilemma.

I accept what my hon. Friend said about the dangers under certain Attorneys-General, and it is certainly true that historically the Attorney-General has an ambiguous function, being both legal adviser to the Government and part of the Government, and that that dual function can be misconstrued abroad. Nevertheless, I do not accept his

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absolutist approach; I think that he fails to appreciate the international nature of crime nowadays, especially drug trafficking, money laundering and paedophilia, or to understand the public concern about the nature of certain groups that find sanctuary in our country and abuse our laws.

There is therefore a need not to take an absolutist approach but to seek to address real problems. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael)—he seems always to be involved in several Bills at the same time and has amassed great experience in drafting, which I am sure that he will put to good use shortly from the Government Benches—for having tried robustly to suggest various mechanisms to the Government. Those mechanisms may not be wholly acceptable, and the Government clearly have access to resources that are denied to the Opposition, but they seem ready to accept certain safeguards.

Some problems exist and the Government have promised to provide safeguards. We have yet to see the colour of their money, but an undertaking has been given. Although I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead, I accept that the Government have moved and recognised the problem. They have said that they will use their resources to provide an appropriate response in the other place. I think it only proper, given that they have so moved, to withhold judgment until we see the nature of their response.

12.45 pm

Mr. Michael: The Minister and the Bill's promoter, the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), have heard both support for the Bill and expressions of concern about how powers might be misused. We all understand the fears of hon. Members. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) argued strongly that the powers should not be used to undermine the struggle for freedom and justice in different parts of the world. However, he also acknowledged that he would not want to defend evil and unprincipled villains who break the law and cause murder and mayhem around the world. We are united in our aspirations for the legislation.

The difficulty of knowing where to draw the line has been acknowledged by the Minister. Mafia killers in the United States were caught only on tax evasion charges. Those guilty of war crimes, and even genocide, could not be pursued in our courts until the War Crimes Act 1991 was passed. British men involved in the evil of child sex abuse abroad could not be pursued until last year, when the House passed legislation to allow their prosecution in our courts. British thugs involved in racial attacks abroad, organised and orchestrated in the United Kingdom, are still able to laugh at justice because they cannot be prosecuted in the United Kingdom. Those evils, sometimes cloaked under a false veil of interest in football, are among the nastiest activities. I know that hon. Members who are concerned that a line should be drawn would not want to defend such people. Those are the evils that we want to pursue and the Bill makes it possible to pursue them.

The Minister promised to introduce a mechanism to protect those whom hon. Members feel should not be pursued under the Bill. That was the only point of major discussion in the debate. The Minister is therefore on the same side of the argument as the rest of us. I ask him to persuade the Home Secretary, and those responsible for legislation in another place, that the mechanism for that protection should be put into the Bill by an amendment. He should do all that he can to ensure that that mechanism is as effective as possible and provides as complete an assurance as possible. I know that the Minister will do his best. I am sure that hon. Members agree that he has the support of the House in seeking to make that an effective and genuine form of protection that will stand the test of time. If it is a mechanism that simply glosses over the problem, we shall have to return and amend the legislation, which would be a pity.

I give the Minister the strongest encouragement to provide the assurance that hon. Members have sought, because we shall then with an easy mind be able to say that the legislation can be used to pursue the evil and wicked, without carrying with it the danger that those who are not involved in evil and wicked acts might also be caught unintentionally, and certainly against the intentions of Parliament.

12.48 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence: No one can seriously deny that the Bill is necessary, and not many people have done so. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on introducing the Bill and I thank him for inviting me to be one of its sponsors.

No civilised society can sit back and let serious crime be perpetrated on its land. No civilised society, particularly in this new world of internationalism, can sit back and see serious crime conceived in our land, or incited on our land, to be committed in another country. We all have to get together to ensure that our laws deal adequately with this new era of international crime.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who said that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne did not fully understand the nature of international crime. I believe that he does. It is for that very reason that the Bill has been produced and we are debating it today.

Of course, no legislation is perfect. I have spent some time, for which I apologise—I hope that, in the end, it will turn out not to have been necessary—

Mr. Donald Anderson: I tried to say precisely the opposite. Both the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and I have practised in matters that involve international terrorism. He and I are well aware of the globalisation of crime nowadays.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am pleased that the meaning intended was the same as that which I intend, although the words may have appeared to come out differently.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East and I were concerned that acutely political legislation was being introduced which contained no provision for the instrument of this state, personified in law by the Attorney-General, to decide when a prosecution would be against the interests of this country.

I am greatly reassured by my hon. Friend the Minister's assurance that the matter will be further looked into and that the specific points that we have raised will be dealt

with. I know that I can give my full trust to the Government to deal with that adequately and to the reasonable satisfaction of everyone. That it is necessary to deal with the point, I have no doubt. There will be cases in which we will want to say, "Steady. It simply is not in the interests of this state to pursue a prosecution." That power must be vested in those who decide whether a prosecution should be brought. It is too late to take such a decision once the prosecution is in train.

We have received undertakings. Other matters have come to light during the interesting debates—I do not often take part in them now—in Standing Committee and at other stages in the Bill's proceedings. A number of issues have been raised and dealt with and the Bill is being improved. Therefore, I express my gratitude to my hon. Friends the Minister and the Member for Eastbourne for coming up with a conclusion that satisfies us all. Serious crime will be dealt with in an international context. We have considerable international responsibilities. A gap in the law is being filled by an important piece of legislation.

12.52 pm

Mr. Leigh: We have had a series of excellent debates in Committee, this morning and on Second Reading. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on the care with which he considered all the amendments that we tabled in Committee and on Report. However, I am still worried about the Bill, although I understand why it is necessary and I do not oppose it.

I tabled some amendments for debate today, but they were not necessary, because my hon. Friend the Minister made a concession. My amendments would have ensured that the Director of Public Prosecutions was required always to consult the Attorney-General about prosecutions for political offences. My hon. Friend the Minister has now given a concession that he will so consult. Ultimately, whether a prosecution is brought will be a matter for political judgment.

The only warning that I give to the House is this. We are all united against international terrorism. It is an easy thing to say, a little like saying that we are all united in defence of the family; but life is not as simple as that. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) gave a number of examples to prove that we are dealing with a grey area.

I understand that it is public policy of Her Majesty's Government and the American Government to ensure by all peaceful means, apparently, that Saddam Hussein is removed from power. As we know, however, there is no peaceful way in which to remove him from power. He is holding his subjects in a condition of absolute tyranny and his regime is maintained by terror. I suspect that it is a matter of public policy in this country and in America that those groups that are seeking to overthrow Saddam Hussein by terrorist means should be covertly supported. I suspect that everyone in the House would like Saddam Hussein to be removed by terrorist means, but that, of course, would be an offence under the Bill, which is soon to be an Act.

The truth is, and we all know it, that now that the Attorney-General will be involved—none of us suggested that; it is a political decision—he will be taking political decisions. If a group operating from London were discovered to be fomenting terrorism against Iraq, I strongly suspect that once the Bill is enacted its members would not be prosecuted.

Mr. Donald Anderson: If a safeguard of the nature suggested by the Government were not built into the Bill, it would of course be possible for a private citizen to initiate a prosecution. That would cause considerable problems.

Mr. Leigh: I accept that point. I am glad that the Minister has made various concessions today, but I suspect that, if a terrorist group were discovered to be inciting or fomenting terrorism against Saudi Arabia, its members would be prosecuted under the Bill.

The thought that I should like to leave with the House is whether the Bill is in keeping with our traditions of creating law. Is the type of decision proposed by the Bill one in which the Attorney-General or the DPP should be involved? Surely a person should be prosecuted because he has committed or allegedly committed an illegal act. We should not indulge in a cherry-picking exercise where the Attorney-General is involved in highly politicised decisions, influenced not by what is right or wrong in terms of jurisprudence, but by what is right or wrong in terms of international diplomacy and British national interest.

Hon. Members may say that I am simply wrong and ask why the Attorney-General should not be involved in such decisions. In any event, that undoubtedly will happen. I should like to leave this thought with the House: it is a strange sort of law for us to pass on a Friday morning which will result in some terrorists being prosecuted and others not being prosecuted. That is something about which we should be worried.

We should also be worried about the sheer practicalities of the Bill. For example, what about the problems of collecting evidence both at home and abroad and the disparity in the resources of the prosecution and the defence about which I spoke before? What about the difficulties of adducing evidence in a British court in front of a British jury relating to something that happened in a faraway country of which we know little, which has a system of law totally alien to the British concept of justice and of which we have little conception?

Those serious points must be further considered. The difficulty we face is that, for reasons of British national interest, it is useful for Her Majesty's Government to explain to friendly foreign powers that they have the means to prosecute people who may be causing trouble in this country. Fundamentally, that is what the Bill is about. Such powers may well be in the British national interest, which is why I am not prepared to oppose the Bill. I must defer to the judgment of the Foreign Secretary and of the Home Secretary on those matters.

As Back Benchers, however, I should have thought that we are entitled to ask those questions, and we have asked them. The Bill has at least been improved to the extent that the Minister has made the concession that the Attorney-General will be consulted. No doubt the Bill will be passed into law; no doubt the other place will also want to examine it carefully.

12.59 pm

Mr. Kirkhope: This has been an excellent and important debate. I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on promoting the Bill, and on the excellent way in which he has guided it. He has listened to the concerns of hon. Members, and has taken those into account as the Bill has progressed.

There is no doubt about the threat of international terrorist activity in the United Kingdom. Hon. Members need think back only a few weeks to the letter bombs delivered to the offices of an Arabic newspaper in London, which seriously injured one person, or back a little further, to December, to the conviction of two individuals for car bombing the Israeli embassy and a Jewish charity building, in London, in July 1994. In the same year, two members of a Kurdish terrorist organisation, the PKK, were sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment for arson attacks directed against Turkish premises. International terrorists, by definition, commit crimes abroad to cause political change, and hon. Members have spoken in some detail about those issues.

The threat of international terrorist activity to the United Kingdom is closely linked to the threat of such activity being conducted from the UK. Hon. Members have asked on which terrorists or terrorist groups the Bill might impinge. On Second Reading, hon. Members mentioned various press reports or allegations about the activities in the UK of supporters of international terrorist groups, such as Hamas. Often those allegations are unfounded, either because they relate to activities that are not offences under UK law, such as political propaganda or charitable fund raising, or because they are not substantiated by evidence. Some of the activities mentioned in this debate would not necessarily fall foul of UK law, because laws in this country allow freedom of expression and freedom of political organisation against regimes or Governments that are not to the liking of those involved.

Investigations have not shown any evidence that Hamas supporters in this country are actively involved in organising or funding terrorism abroad, but we do take any allegations of terrorist activity here very seriously. The police and the security services devote high priority to countering any activity here in support of international terrorism. When there is evidence, we can and we do take action under our current law—for example, by excluding or deporting people from the United Kingdom. However, the Bill would very much strengthen our ability to do so, and underline our determination not to tolerate support here for terrorism abroad.

Security and legal considerations preclude me from going into detail about current investigations, but I can say that, for example, two Algerian nationals are currently in custody in the UK, subject to applications by the French authorities to extradite them in connection with the 1995 bombing campaign in France. One of the individuals is alleged to have been involved in those offences from the UK. The Bill will also prove useful in the fight against those involved in organised international crime.

Mr. Galloway: All the examples the Minister has cited have been or are being dealt with under existing British law. The maniacs who tried to blow up the Israeli embassy and the Jewish charitable building were dealt with under due process of British law. The Minister has just told us that two Algerians are facing extradition to France—God's speed to that extradition—where they are alleged to be guilty of serious terrorism. They are all being dealt with under existing law. We are now inventing a new law; surely the Minister should be making a case for that.

Mr. Kirkhope: I have tried to explain that the Bill will strengthen our powers. We do indeed already have some powers, but the new ones will be extremely useful in our fight against international crime being organised from this country.

Criminals are involved in a wide range of offences, including passport fraud, drug trafficking and illegal immigration. A joint development between the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the law authorities in the Netherlands, for example, resulted in the arrest of 14 individuals in the UK and the Netherlands for drug trafficking. Economic crimes, such as corporate market manipulation, have been the subject of attention by NCIS working with the appropriate financial regulation authorities.

Successes have also been scored against paedophiles. As hon. Members are well aware, legislation currently before the House is helping to strengthen our approach against this vile and despicable crime.

Through NCIS, we have targeted individuals who were suspected of producing counterfeit dollars in the UK for use in the United States. That operation was the work of a number of agencies, and investigations have also uncovered forged documents linked to a European operation controlled by an organised crime group. There are many examples of the types of crime which the Bill will assist us to detect and take action against.

I know that concerns have been expressed in various ways, but I hope that the assurance that I gave a little earlier will help to allay them. We are not against asylum, as the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) almost suggested. We want to grant asylum; the Bill does nothing to take away from people who fear for their lives the right to come here and be safe as long as they are prepared to accept this country's laws. That notion is paramount and it is what lies behind this important Bill. I commend it to the House.

1.6 pm

Mr. Waterson: We have had an interesting debate of very high quality. I am grateful for the element of cross-party support for the Bill and must thank especially the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) for his efforts during its various stages. I also thank my colleagues who have given up their time on a Friday to be here rather than in their constituencies.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) made plain his root-and-branch opposition to the Bill, but he also made some thought-provoking points, for which I thank him. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) made a characteristic contribution.

I am delighted to welcome the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) to our debate. This is the first time that we have had the benefit of the views of the Liberal Democrats on this matter. I do not accept his criticism that the Bill is ill considered or

rushed—we have had full debates in Committee and on Second Reading, as well as today. I ask him to consider the safeguards included in the Bill.

I am delighted to welcome the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) to our deliberations again. He knows that I do not agree with his comments about the safeguards, but I am grateful for his continuing interest in the Bill. I thank my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) for their support and for their detailed scrutiny of the Bill.

There is a clear, and perhaps surprising, loophole in our laws which the Bill is designed to close. Because our approach to territoriality of jurisdiction is based, as has been mentioned, on the Queen's peace, it enables people to conspire and incite criminal acts while in this country. All we are doing is applying the principle, which the House approved in the Sexual Offences (Conspiracy and Incitement) Act 1996, across the range of criminal law—the principle of extra-territoriality of jurisdiction, whether it relates to paedophilia, terrorism, fraud, drug trafficking, football hooliganism or a range of other possible offences.

The Bill has safeguards to protect our long tradition of providing safe haven for refugees and the like. As the hon. Member for Hillhead pointed out, Karl Marx is perhaps the best example of that. He sat peacefully and without interruption in the reading room of the British museum. The Bill will have no effect on peaceful dissent and political opposition. It contains the fundamental safeguard of dual criminality and the normal safeguard of the prosecution having to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The hon. Gentleman is speaking as though he is not in favour of the concession made by the Home Office. Does he agree that another argument for involving the Attorney-General is the possibility that a tyrannical regime overseas could urge, finance and give evidence to a private individual in this country sympathetic to that tyrannical regime to bring an action against someone like Mandela, whose broad opposition to such a tyrannical regime we would support?

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated my next point, which is that much of the debate that he has instigated has been about whether the Attorney-General's consent should be a precondition for a prosecution or whether some other mechanism can be arrived at for what the hon. Gentleman described in Committee as high-profile cases—those sensitive cases with a political and perhaps an international element. That is why I very much welcome the announcement made by my hon. Friend the Minister, as I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does. The announcement meets the legitimate concerns expressed in our debates. We cannot permit people who come to this country as a safe haven to abuse our hospitality by plotting to commit criminal acts abroad and let them go unpunished. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.11 pm

Mr. Skinner: I have listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), who attempted earlier to stop the proceedings. I was a couple of minutes late for that. I heard the generality of his views.

I suspect that the Bill was introduced by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) because it came off a Home Office shelf. It is, to all intents and purposes, a Government Bill.

Mr. Waterson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to our debate, which has been going on for some time. I assure him that I take full responsibility for the Bill. It is my Bill. If there are any defects in it, I shall be delighted to explain or defend them. It is my Bill and I am delighted to have the opportunity of putting it to the House.

Mr. Skinner: Of course it is the hon. Gentleman's Bill now. The truth is that it comes off the Government's shelf. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), who was on the Committee, made it plain without being challenged that the Bill came from the Home Office.

There are not many Fridays for authentic private Members' Bills. This is one of the rare occasions—there are even fewer than normal in this Session before the general election. The system has been abused, probably by Governments of both parties over many years. It is time that that was stopped. That is the first reason why I do not like the use of Bills off the Government's shelves, taking up valuable time that should be for authentic private Members' Bills.

When I was listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead at 10 o'clock this morning, he was talking about terrorists versus freedom fighters. He talked about the classic example of Nelson Mandela having been in this country. Nelson Mandela was regarded by Tory Members of Parliament in particular as a terrorist. They wanted to hang, draw and quarter him. When we had the celebration in Westminster Hall a few months ago, I went in early, and when I got there the first four rows were occupied by Tory Members of Parliament who had wanted to keep Nelson Mandela in gaol for ever. He had become not a terrorist but a freedom fighter.

The same was true of Archbishop Makarios, who was a terrorist, but finished up taking tea at Buckingham palace. I remember going to a meeting in one of the Committee Rooms to hear Robert Mugabe before he became the leader of his country. He was a terrorist then, but he has now been in power for well over a decade. For that reason, I am very disturbed about the way in which the Bill—a political Bill to its backbone—is being used.

I have heard several references to the fact that the Government want to control football hooligans with the Bill. If they want to control football hooligans, they should bring in a Bill to control football hooligans. If the Government want to get hold of the international drug conspiracy and all those other seedy affairs, they should bring in a Bill to do that. What they have done is to use a piggyback method. They have used the argument about hooligans and drugs as the soft argument, in the knowledge that the freedom fighters and asylum seekers will get caught up in the net. That is how I see it.

The Bill is an abuse of the Friday procedure, because the Government have used one of their Back Benchers to get it through. The Attorney-General will be able to use a pick-and-mix method in deciding, in a political sense, who is picked up and who is not. The Bill is a catch-all for various groups. If the Government want to be specific about hooliganism at football matches, drug dealing,

[Mr. Skinner]

terrorism and all the other crimes we abhor, they should do so in a principled fashion. They should introduce a Bill between Monday and Thursday so that it is dealt with in the appropriate way. For those three reasons, I shall join my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead if he decides to divide the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 26, Noes 0.

Division No. 76] **[1.16 pm**

AYES

Batiste, Spencer	Malone, Gerald
Bowis, John	Merchant, Piers
Butler, Peter	Ottaway, Richard
Cormack, Sir Patrick	Steen, Anthony
Dykes, Hugh	Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
French, Douglas	Viggers, Peter
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*	Waterson, Nigel
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*	Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*	Whitney, Sir Raymond
Kirkhope, Timothy	Wilkinson, John
Lait, Mrs Jacqui	Wood, Timothy
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman	
Lawrence, Sir Ivan	**Tellers for the Ayes:**
Leigh, Edward	**Mr. Peter Atkinson and**
MacGregor, Rt Hon John	**Mr. Michael Fabricant.**

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. George Galloway and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

It appearing from the report of the Division that 40 Members had not taken part in the Division, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided, and the business under consideration stood over until the next sitting of the House.*

Police (Health and Safety) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[DAME JANET FOOKES *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

APPLICATION OF PART I OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ETC. ACT 1974 TO POLICE

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

1.27 pm

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): I should like to offer a few words of general introduction to the clause and the Bill.

The Bill is a relatively simple measure that seeks to place police officers, special constables and police cadets in the same position as other workers under health and safety legislation. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 does not apply to the work of police officers, unlike the work of police civilian support staff. That is because their employment status does not fall within the Act's definition of employment. That follows decisions in the courts, which have held that persons who hold the office of constable are not employees but are appointed as members of their police force and attested. The provisions of the 1974 Act, which depend on the employer-employee relationship, do not therefore apply to police constables.

Since the mid-1970s, however, police forces have sought to apply the Act's protection to their officers, but on a voluntary basis. The Bill is a response to representations from the Police Federation and other bodies that represent the police. They believe that the extra discipline that comes from statutory compliance will lead to improvements in the health, safety and welfare of police officers. In recent years, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has allocated substantial resources to giving officers the equipment they need to protect themselves against violent assault. The service has welcomed the new batons, the protective clothing and the CS spray. The Bill will complement those resources and will make police managers more aware of their responsibilities for the safety of the officers whom they command.

The Bill would empower the police representative bodies to play an important role in appointing safety representatives and establishing safety committees, which are the essential components in the effective management of health and safety. The Bill also enables the health and safety legislation of Northern Ireland to be amended to apply to officers, cadets and special constables of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. In anticipation of the new legislation, the Home Office and the police service have prepared a package of practical guidance that will help forces to comply with the Bill once it comes into force.

The move from voluntary compliance with the spirit of the health and safety legislation to compliance on a statutory basis should not impose additional costs. In the longer term, safer and healthier systems of work will provide the possibility of savings.

I emphasise that the Bill has the strong support of the Association of Chief Police Officers, the national associations of police superintendents, the Police

Federation and right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. The real beneficiaries of the legislation will be the officers who patrol our streets, investigate crime and carry out many hazardous duties on behalf of their communities. The House will always wish to accord a high priority to their health and safety.

As I have said, the essence of the Bill is found in clause 1. It will insert a new section 51A into the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to extend its provisions to apply to police constables, including special constables and police cadets. The new section provides that a person who holds the office of constable or police cadet shall be treated as an employee of the relevant officer. In the police forces that are established under the police legislation, that officer will be the chief constable or the Commissioner in the case of the Metropolitan and City forces.

After the enactment of the Police Bill, the clause will provide for the relevant director general to be the employer of constables serving in the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad. In the case of all other police forces, such as the British Transport Police or the Ministry of Defence Police, the employer will be the person who has the direction and control of the constables or cadets in question. The Bill will also apply to officers who are seconded to work in central service, for example in the national directorate of police training or with Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

The clause also provides for functions conferred on recognised trade unions by regulations made under the 1974 Act to be exercised by the national police federations and any other police representative body. That is needed because police officers are not allowed to join trade unions. The effect will be that the representative bodies will enjoy the rights to appoint safety representatives and to sit on safety committees. That is an important provision, because employee-employer co-operation and consultation is the basis of good health and safety.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The Bill is unique, because its notes on clauses provide more illumination than the Bill itself. I have always complained that notes on clauses for Government Bills usually do not tell us anything more than, and sometimes use the same words as, the actual Bills. I hope that the hon. Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) or the Minister will be able to clear up one puzzle for the House. The Bill is in essence a Government Bill, although I am sure that the hon. Gentleman takes full responsibility for it. The legislation has, however, been drafted by Government draftsmen and the Government must take responsibility for ensuring that the legislation is right.

Sir Raymond Whitney: I would like to clarify that point. The hon. Gentleman surely knows this, but for the record it is important to make it clear that those of us who are fortunate enough to come high in the ballot for private Members' Bills are deluged with proposals for new legislation, and that it is up to each individual Member to select what seems to him or her a good idea. The Bill certainly struck me as a good idea. Of course, I remain grateful to the Home Office and its officials for their assistance in its drafting.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman put that beautifully. Everybody wants the Bill to go through, but there are questions that need to be answered, and it is right for the House to scrutinise it. The difficulty when a Government Bill is adopted by a private Member is that one is questioning two targets—the Member in charge of the Bill and the Minister—at the same time. I am becoming rather adept at that now, because we have had a lot of experience of it this Session. Almost every private Member's Bill seems to have been adopted after having been, shall we say, "produced" by the Home Office—I was almost drawn into questions of parentage then, but I resisted the temptation.

What drew my attention to clause 1 was the passage in the notes on clauses that says that subsection (4) of the proposed new section 51A

"enables the regulations made under section 2(4) of the 1974 Act to specify as a recognised trade union any other recognised body representing the constables and cadets in National Crime Squad, NCIS and non-home department police forces."

The hon. Member for Wycombe mentioned that, and I know that there has been considerable discussion about it. It is a long-standing anomaly that the police have not been covered by health and safety legislation, as is envisaged in the Bill, so I must make it clear that we welcome the measure. It will assist in providing a better and safer environment for police officers to work in, and has the potential to reduce injuries and accidents at work, to the benefit of all concerned within the police force, and of the public at large.

Clause 1 will introduce a new subsection 51A to the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, which will mean that the Bill will cover police officers, special constables and police cadets. It then says that police officers seconded to the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad are to be covered by health and safety at work legislation. The clause is less clear about the position of other central service officers. Will they be similarly covered by health and safety legislation?

Concern has also been expressed by the Police Federation because its position as a representative body in relation to NCIS, NCS and officers of other central service is not made clear in the Bill. The proposed subsection 3(a) says that for the purposes of health and safety legislation,

"the Police Federation for England and Wales shall be treated as a recognised trade union recognised by each chief officer of police".

The hon. Member for Wycombe made that clear. But no similar passage defines the position in respect of NCIS and NCS, unless the phrase

"each chief officer of police"

includes the heads of those two organisations.

I look to the Minister for clarification. There is certainly a good argument in favour of their being covered, but the Police Federation seems to believe that they are not included as chief constables. There is a requirement that the heads of those agencies should be chief constables, but they are not designated as such in that role. That may be the source of the confusion.

Even if NCIS and the National Crime Squad are included, by being defined within the reference to chief officers, that would not work in respect of other central service officers. Their position requires clarification.

Clauses 3 and 4 give police officers the right not to suffer detriment in health and safety cases, and provide limited access to industrial tribunals. Again, questions have been raised about that by the Police Federation.

[Mr. Michael]

Clause 4 gives the right of access to industrial tribunals to officers who have been dismissed on certain grounds relating to health and safety. In the original Home Office brief, access to tribunals was to have been limited, and would not have included circumstances in which police officers were dismissed, required to resign or reduced in rank. The reasoning is that in those circumstances police officers have the right of access to a police appeals tribunal. The Police Federation is concerned to see that the right of access to industrial tribunals does not change the situation in respect of police officers' rights to access police appeals tribunals. That issue will not be new to the Minister. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have been approached on the subject by representatives of police organisations in their area, so the Minister should clarify the issue for the record.

Those questions do not detract from my welcome for the Bill, and I congratulate its adoptive parent, the hon. Member for Wycombe, on bringing it before Parliament. Perhaps at some point its natural parent might clarify the issues so that we know exactly where we stand and so that the officers who have concerns and seek assurances may be satisfied.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) on introducing the Bill. I have talked to him about it, and I know how much work he has done and how committed he is to this sensible measure. As the grandson of a police sergeant, I am happy to support the Bill. We should welcome any measure that would assist the police in their duties and ensure that they are compensated properly.

The Government welcome the Bill. On 16 October 1996, the Minister of State at the Home Office announced at a seminar for chief officers that the Government intended to extend the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to police officers, cadets and special constables when a proper opportunity was found to do so. This Bill provides that opportunity. In anticipation of the Bill's introduction, the Home Office police policy directorate published three volumes of guidance, entitled "Police Health and Safety", in October 1996. The purpose of the documents is to

"assist chief officers and their senior commanders in reviewing their force health and safety arrangements in the light of the Government's decision to enact legislation to extend the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to police officers."

The Act does not currently apply to police officers as they are not classified as employees—a peculiarity of historical incident—but are persons appointed as members of police forces and attested as constables. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe takes a keen interest in European issues, and he will be pleased to learn that his Bill brings British legislation in line with that of the European Community, so there is no risk of conflict. The general principles of EC health and safety law are set out in the framework directive 89/391 which, like the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act, contains provisions of a general nature and is supported by so-called "daughter" directives dealing with more specific matters, such as personal protective equipment.

United Kingdom implementation of the framework directive took the form of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations SI 1992/2051, which came into force on 1 January 1993. Both the Act and the EC regulations place some duties on employers to ensure that their undertaking does not prejudice the health and safety of persons not in their employ.

The police health and safety notes to which I referred state that, when the Act came into force, the home Departments made it clear that police officers should, wherever possible, be given the protection that it afforded. In that spirit of voluntary co-operation, the enforcing authority, the Health and Safety Executive, monitors the health and safety arrangements of police forces. When the legislation is passed—as I hope it will be—visits by HSE inspectors will be on a statutory basis.

I address a question to my hon. Friend, which perhaps the Minister will comment on also. I have always understood that the Act does not apply within the precincts of the Palace of Westminster. Therefore, will the health and safety at work legislation that we are presently contemplating apply to those policemen whom we meet frequently in the Palace of Westminster? I warmly support the Bill and wish it every success.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): I, too, broadly welcome the introduction of the Bill and believe that it will be welcomed by the general public as well as by hon. Members on both sides of the House. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) said, it is certainly welcomed by the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Superintendents Association and the Police Federation. Having said that, I do not wholeheartedly welcome the Bill in that I have a couple of reservations on which my hon. Friend might be able to reassure me.

The first is that the Bill incorporates a derogation. I shall quote *The House Magazine*, in which my hon. Friend wrote about the Bill saying:

"Another important provision will be the incorporation of a derogation taken from the European Framework Directive on health and safety management. Briefly paraphrased this will provide that the legislation will not apply in circumstances when there is an inevitable conflict between police operations and the health and safety legislation."

I am concerned that there have been instances in the not too distant past of the European Court of Justice deciding that, although Britain had thought legislation might be limited in its application, particularly when it originated in Brussels, the Brussels impact was much wider. I would not want to think that this legislation, which we are introducing under the derogation, might be affected by any future judgment of the European court. The operational aspects of the Bill also concern me, but I will mention those when we debate clause 2.

1.45 pm

The other area that disturbs me is that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State at the Home Office is reported, in an article published in the *Scotsman* on 16 October 1996, as telling a seminar:

"One of the difficulties in moving towards a statutory regime"—

such as this—

"has been the fact that policing duties and the environment in which they are carried out are so different from those which generally apply in factories, offices and other static premises."

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) also pointed that out. My right hon. Friend went on to say:

"The difficulty has been compounded by the absence of any guidance which expresses the health and safety provisions in terms which can be seen to be relevant to the operational work of police officers."

As I said, that concerns me deeply, but it probably applies more to clause 2, so I will not progress the argument until we reach that clause. That question must be dealt with, however, as it is at the heart of the Bill.

The same article states that Bill Spence, the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland and the chief constable of Tayside, while generally welcoming the Bill,

"would be concerned if the cost of implementing the measures meant that officers had to be withdrawn from duty."

I listened carefully and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe said in his introductory remarks that he believed that there would be no additional costs. I doubt that. When I was in business before 1992, I found that compliance with Health and Safety Executive regulations could be a costly exercise. My reservation about the Bill is that it could be a costly exercise for the police, which might have consequences for police manpower on our streets.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) for his clear explanation of the purpose of the Bill and the content of the clause.

The issues surrounding the legislation are of concern not only to my hon. Friend, but to the Home Office. That is a happy coincidence and it is a reflection of the fact that the Home Office is in tune with the feelings of the people of this country on most matters as well as with those of hon. Members who are lucky in the ballot. I know that my hon. Friend is extremely keen on the issue, and we are keen to oblige him and the House, as well as those involved, and to support the Bill.

The Bill is timely because it coincides with the Government's legislative proposals. Those were announced by the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), last October, when he launched a programme to improve health and safety standards in the police service, which is a laudable aim that we should all support.

As my hon. Friend said, his Bill has the strong support of the police associations. The Government share the service's concern to establish the highest standards of safety for police officers. We are ever conscious of the hazards that they face daily in the course of their duties—hazards that, as we all know, are often completely unexpected. That is why we are committed to providing the service with the best possible protection against violent attack: the replacement of the wooden truncheon with modern batons and improved and regular safety training have already done much to increase that protection.

More recently, the introduction of CS spray has proved effective and been welcomed by officers. In collaboration with the police scientific development branch, forces have been developing better standards of protective clothing and equipment, including body armour that is easier to wear.

There is already a strong safety culture in the police service, which is reflected in the guidance issued by the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers and in the standards of training provided both centrally and within forces. Forces have been complying with the spirit of the health and safety legislation since the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, but moving to statutory compliance will give an added focus to their efforts.

My hon. Friend has suggested that moving from voluntary to statutory compliance should not of itself impose additional costs and that in the longer term it might even provide the possibility of savings. We agree with that and, with your permission, Dame Janet, I should like briefly to set out our reasoning, as it is an important consideration.

Our assessment is based on several factors. Health and safety is not a new issue in the service. The health and safety at work legislation has of course always applied to the civilian staff, and police officers have benefited indirectly by working in the same premises. As my hon. Friend said, forces have been applying the legislation to officers on a voluntary basis since 1975.

From that, and from the operational imperatives, a strong safety culture has grown. Health and safety issues are already covered adequately in most areas of hazardous police work through, for example, the application of ACPO guidelines. It is also relevant that under civil law chief officers and police authorities have a legal duty of care for police officers and should already be budgeting accordingly.

The Government accept that in the lead-up to the new legislation forces will need to review their present arrangements and that some adaptations will be necessary. In most cases that will involve providing appropriate training for managers, especially in the preparation of risk assessments and in improving accident and sickness management. We have issued comprehensive guidance to facilitate those tasks.

Taking into account the time scale that we are proposing for the introduction of the legislation, we believe that the forces should be able to implement the changes comfortably within their existing budgets. In the longer term, we are confident that forces will reap real benefits. Experience shows that investment in health and safety reduces sickness costs and the civil claims that so often follow accidents. The money saved will be available for fighting crime.

The real beneficiaries of the Bill will be the officers who patrol our streets, investigate crimes and carry out many hazardous duties on our behalf. Their safety and health must always be accorded a high priority.

I wish to clarify our intentions in respect of some of the provisions of clause 1 in response to several concerns raised, particularly by the Police Federation. I have little to add to the explanation of my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe of the purpose and effect of the clause. It extends the health and safety legislation to all who hold the office of constable or who serve as police cadets, whether in the so-called Home Office forces, or the non-Home Office forces, such as the British Transport police, the Ministry of Defence police or other bodies to which police officers are seconded. It is right that for health and safety purposes, their employer should be the chief officer, as he or she is responsible for their direction and control.

In our discussions with the service about the Bill, concerns have been raised about possible conflict between the requirements of the health and safety legislation and

[Mr. Timothy Kirkhope]

operational imperatives. In the course of a riot, it is clearly not possible for a police commander to take account of every regulation that might apply. To a large extent, that is already covered by the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. The general duties that section 2 imposes on employers are qualified by the phrase

"so far as is reasonably practical".

I am sure that that will please my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant).

Some of the regulations made under section 15 of the 1974 Act are expressed in absolute terms, and in certain circumstances it might not be possible for police forces to comply. For example, officers at the front line at the beginning of a spontaneously occurring riot will not normally be equipped according to the requirements of the personal protective equipment regulations. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary proposes to address the matter by making a regulation to the effect that in its application to the police service, the test of reasonable practicability will apply in circumstances where there is an inevitable conflict between the regulation and the demands of police operations.

In bringing the Bill into force, the Home Secretary also proposes to make regulations under section 2(4) of the 1974 Act on the arrangements to apply with regard to the recognition of the police representative bodies as trade unions in the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad. That was raised by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). This will apply also to the non-Home Office forces. In the case of the new services, subject to consultation with the respective directors general and the Health and Safety Executive, the intention of policy will be to provide that the national federations and the police representative bodies are deemed to be recognised trade unions for the purposes of the regulations.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) that the Palace of Westminster is not covered. The issue is under consideration and being discussed with the unions and the House authorities.

As provided by clause 7, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will make an order to extend the health and safety legislation of Northern Ireland in the same way as the Bill provides for Great Britain. The aim is for the order to come into force on the date determined by the Home Secretary for the Bill to come into operation. That date will be determined in consultation with the Associations of Chief Police Officers.

Mr. Michael: I apologise if the Minister is about to come to this, but will he comment on representation in NCIS, the National Crime Squad and in respect of other central functions?

Mr. Kirkhope: I wanted to return to that issue in the debates on later clauses where it is more applicable. If the hon. Gentleman can contain himself, I shall comment later.

We are aiming at a provisional date of late spring 1998 for the Bill's commencement. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe for promoting the Bill. I commend the clause to the House.

Sir Raymond Whitney: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for clarifying the points raised in the debate. They were legitimate points and I am grateful to the hon. Members who raised them. I am grateful also for their support for the general principle of the Bill.

Mr. Michael: I confess that I was surprised that the Minister did not respond to my point because I thought that it came up under clause 1. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will deal with it, or the Minister may like to intervene. Clause 1(3)(a) provides for chief officers in England and Wales to recognise the trade union status of the Police Federation for England and Wales. The interpretation appears to be that that does not cover NCIS or the National Crime Squad. I asked whether the wording covered the chiefs of those organisations. I hope that the hon. Gentleman or the Minister can clarify that, and also the point in relation to the central services. The matter arises under clause 1—not later, as the Minister suggests.

Sir Raymond Whitney: It is my understanding that that is the case, but I will ensure, in conjunction with the Home Office, that it is clarified. My hon. Friend the Minister may have a further comment to make at this stage on that important issue.

I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), whose views on the European Court of Justice may not precisely coincide with my own, that I have every optimism that there will be no problems with the ECJ. The Bill is highly beneficial for all concerned.

A potential conflict remains between the requirements of health and safety and the operational requirements of the police service, but that is well understood by all parties. I am optimistic that those conflicts will always be resolved in a sensible manner against the background of the statutory provisions in the Bill.

2 pm

Mr. Kirkhope: I thought that I had covered the point a few moments ago, but I am clearly being told that I did not. I thought that I said clearly that arrangements would be made for recognition of the police representative bodies as trade unions in the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad. If I have not covered that point, perhaps the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth can explain—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry; I realise that he cannot do so because I am intervening in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney). In any event, I thought that I had covered the point. If I have not, I will return to it in due course.

Sir Raymond Whitney: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is facilitating a useful discussion. The fact that a body will be recognised as a trade union in respect of NCIS and the National Crime Squad is clear. That will presumably also apply in respect of other central functions. What is not clear is the position of the Police Federation. The position is made clear in respect of the Home Office forces, as the Minister described them—the police forces of

England and Wales—but it is not made clear in respect of NCIS or NCS. That is the point that I want the Minister to clear up.

Sir Raymond Whitney: It is certainly my understanding that the representation will be the same. The point will have to be considered carefully again as the Bill proceeds, we hope, to the other place. Any possible lingering uncertainty—I believe that the points have been clarified—should be resolved.

Mr. Kirkhope: I understand that the position for NCIS is that representation of the federation and other bodies will be covered in regulations under section 2A of the 1974 Act.

Sir Raymond Whitney: I am most grateful for that further clarification.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

MEANING OF "AT WORK" IN RELATION TO CONSTABLES

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I welcome the Bill, but I should like to address a comment to my hon. Friend the Minister. When he draws up his guidance to chief constables on the workings of the legislation, he should deal with the question of police houses. As my hon. Friend knows, in rural areas of Northumberland we have police houses, which sometimes have a notice outside saying "Northumbria Constabulary". I want to be certain about the position of those who live in police houses in terms of whether they are on or off duty. If someone knocks on the door, are those living there deemed to be off duty or on duty? The Minister will be aware that officers who live in police houses are not necessarily posted to the area where those police houses are located. That may cause confusion. If my hon. Friend cannot give me an answer now, I should be grateful if he will consider the matter when he draws up the guidance.

Mr. Fabricant: This is the clause about which I have the gravest reservations. It states that a new subsection should be added to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 stating that

"a person holding the office of constable is at work throughout the time when he is on duty, but not otherwise; and".

In other words, when the officer is on duty it is then that those provisions should apply.

I understand that polls are never accurate, including political opinion polls, but I conducted a quick straw poll among the police at the Palace of Westminster. I was reassured to find out that the provisions will not apply to the Palace, but one police officer said that if they did he would go for early retirement. Another asked whether if someone attacked him with a broken bottle on which there was a little bit of dirt, he would have to walk away because he would otherwise be in breach of the health and safety regulations.

On a more serious note, in *Police Review* of 4 October a number of specific questions were asked by Alan Beckley about the difficulties which could arise if the provisions were made statutory. He wrote that those problems could include

"the lack of experience on which to base guidance to forces on how to make risk assessments for all aspects of police work (although generic risk assessments have been prepared)

providing employees, including police officers, with a safe place to work

advising officers who find themselves in life-threatening incidents on how to deal with the situation".

He argued that that was not a practical thing to do under the terms of statutory regulation. Mr. Beckley also referred to

"the action officers should take when faced with danger (retreating or intervening?)"—

and—

"the potential conflict between the operational independence of chief police officers and the powers of Health and Safety Executive inspectors"

That article reflects the concerns that have been expressed by police officers.

Those problems have not been properly addressed by the Bill. I hope that either my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) or my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to reassure me and, indeed, the police officers at the Palace of Westminster who seem to feel so strongly about the matter.

Mr. Kirkhope: It is, of course, correct that clause 2 extends the definitions of "work" and "at work" in section 52 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. It provides that a constable is only to be regarded at work

"throughout the time when he is on duty."

The effect of that is that the duties that the Act imposes upon employers to safeguard the health and safety of employees will not apply when a constable decides to exercise his constabulary powers at times when he is off duty. For example, he may be travelling home on the tube and see someone threatening another passenger with a knife or a gun. In the ensuing fight, the officer could be injured, and the question might arise as to whether he had been adequately protected under the health and safety regulations.

In such a case, where the officer is acting outside the immediate direction and the immediate control of his senior officers—it is a difficult area—it would be unreasonable for the chief officer to be liable under the 1974 Act. The clause simply makes that point clear. It certainly does not affect the officer's position in any way in relation to any other benefits and support to which he might be entitled.

I hope that that offers some reassurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire. It is important to remember that officers have a range of entitlements, benefits and assistance to deal with such matters. To make that assistance statutory and subject to the terms of the 1974 Act in the circumstances that I have described is regarded as unreasonable. I hope that my hon. Friend can accept that point.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 9 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment; read the Third time, and passed.

Sexual Offences (Protected Material) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[DAME JANET FOOKES *in the Chair*]

Clauses 1 to 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 1

REGULATION OF DISCLOSURES BY CRIMINAL CASES REVIEW COMMISSION

'.—(1) Where, in connection with any relevant application made to the Criminal Cases Review Commission, any material falling within any of paragraphs (a) to (c) of section 1(1) would (apart from this section) fall to be disclosed by the Commission to the applicant—

(a) the Commission shall not disclose that material to the applicant; and

(b) it shall instead be disclosed under this Act in accordance with subsections (2) and (3).

(2) The following provisions, namely—

(a) section 3(2) to (5), and

(b) sections 4 to 6,

shall apply in connection with any disclosure by the Commission in relation to which subsection (1) above applies as they apply in connection with any disclosure by the prosecutor in relation to which section 3(1) applies.

(3) For the purposes of—

(a) subsection (1) above, and

(b) the operation, in connection with any such disclosure by the Commission, of the provisions applied by subsection (2) above,

references in this Act to the prosecutor and the defendant shall be read as references to the Commission and the applicant respectively.

(4) In this section—

(a) "relevant application" means an application made to the Commission for the reference under section 9 or 11 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 of any conviction, verdict, finding or sentence of a court in proceedings for a sexual offence; and

(b) "the applicant", in relation to a relevant application, means the person by or on whose behalf the application is made.'.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.12 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also amendment No. 2, in the title, line 2, after 'prosecution', insert

'or by the Criminal Cases Review Commission'.

Mr. Hughes: The Bill currently protects material that is disclosed by the prosecutor in the overwhelming majority of criminal proceedings. However, there are circumstances in which material might be disclosed by someone else, when the Criminal Cases Review Commission discloses material because of an investigation into an alleged miscarriage of justice. There would be no difficulty when the commission refers a case to the Court of Appeal. When the commission declines to refer a case to the Court of Appeal, however, it is obliged to disclose any material it has gathered that is relevant to the decision, which may include protected material.

The Bill must therefore ensure that the commission does not disclose such material to defendants without supervision. It would be wrong for the statements made by victims of sexual offences to fall through the net, as it were, by default or by imprecise drafting of the Bill. New clause 1 would ensure that the commission discloses material in the same way as the prosecutor. The commission would disclose material either to a legal representative who gave the necessary undertaking to supervise the defendant or to the appropriate person who would similarly allow the defendant supervised access. I understand that to include the new clause in the Bill requires a minor amendment to the long title, hence amendment No. 2 which is linked to new clause 1.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I am very happy to support the new clause and the amendment tabled my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), which relate to the disclosure of material by the Criminal Cases Review Commission. My hon. Friend has noticed a loophole in the Bill which might, albeit in unusual circumstances, allow defendants accused of sexual offences to gain access to victims' statements as well as to photographs and medical reports without any safeguards or supervision.

I stress that the new clause does not restrict the full access which an applicant might need to the material that the commission may disclose. The Bill will not prevent the applicant from fully inspecting any material, whether that material is disclosed by the Criminal Cases Review Commission or the prosecution. It seeks to deal only with the misuse that has followed the current method of disclosure by preventing the defendant from taking permanent possession of the material or making copies of it.

2.15 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Am I correct in understanding that the new clause deals with an anomaly which might arise after a decision had been taken by the Criminal Cases Review Commission because of the disclosure needed at that time? Will the Minister reassure us that prior to that—before the commission takes a decision, while the matter is still under consideration by the review body or when that body subsequently refers it to the Court of Appeal—the matter is already dealt with by the Bill as it stands? Have I understood correctly?

Mr. Kirkhope: The hon. Gentleman has indeed understood correctly.

I hope that the Committee will accept the new clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Schedule agreed to.

Title

Amendment made: No. 2, in line 2, after 'prosecution', insert

'or by the Criminal Cases Review Commission'.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Bill, as amended, to be reported.

Order for Third Reading read.

2.17 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill began with a report by the royal commission on criminal justice which said:

"We were disturbed by evidence that we received that victims' statements were being freely circulated for various dubious purpose quite unconnected with the trial."

The commission was supported by the response from the Law Society, which described the circulation of such evidence as "gaol pornography." The Bill will put a stop to that. It will deal with the harm caused by defendants in sexual offence cases who circulate such material as a form of pornography. This material often contains detailed, intimate information about the victim and the crime and has on occasion been used in prison as pornography. Outside prison, defendants and defendants' relatives have on occasion circulated copies of case papers to intimidate witnesses and as part of a lobbying process in an attempt to aid the defendant. We have to put a stop to that rare but harmful practice, and do it now.

All of us who use the Internet know that such material can go around the world in seconds. It is vital that we protect the victims of such crimes from a second assault with photographs, copies of their statements and their medical records being circulated to God knows whom. I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Minister, of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) for the Labour party and of Liberal Democrat Members who have helped to get the Bill through.

2.19 pm

Mr. Michael: I welcome the Bill and I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on providing a vehicle to end an anomaly and a scandal. As he rightly said, the royal commission on criminal justice highlighted the harm done by prison pornography. My only regret is that the Government have taken so long to address the anomaly. The Labour party has tried more than once to have such provisions put in legislation. I have moved amendments similar to these provisions to more than one Bill in Committee without Ministers accepting the sense of urgency that the hon. Gentleman has stressed. With the Bill about to become law, this is not the time to do more than remind the House of that fact: the conversion of Ministers and their support for the Bill is welcome, and we all look forward to this scandal being ended as speedily as possible.

2.20 pm

Mr. Kirkhope: The Government are delighted to support my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) with his Bill. It provides an effective means of tackling the important problem of the misuse of victims' statements and other material in sexual offences cases.

We cannot win. The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) talked about how long we have taken to act, having earlier made comments about how speedy our progress on other legislation has been. The Bill gives statutory effect to proposals that we announced last year, which were widely welcomed. We are particularly pleased that it will make a real contribution to the fight against crime.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Parking Penalty Charge Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.21 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The aim of this simple Bill is to right an injustice that has been felt by several of my constituents and others, particularly in the London area. I gather that it is also a matter of concern to the Automobile Association and the Parking Committee for London.

If a car owner takes his car to a repair garage and leaves it there and the owner or an employee of that garage parks the car on a yellow line and does not pay the penalty ticket, the owner of the car has to fork out the money and is held to be guilty, even though he did not have a guilty mind and did not perpetrate an offence.

The regulations and law that govern the offence come under section 66 and schedule 6 of the Road Traffic Act 1991. The Bill spotlights the injustice and proposes a remedy, although I should be happy to accept any of a number of other ways of solving the problem.

Under the schedule, there are at least two exemptions allowing an owner to escape from carrying the ultimate responsibility: first, if the car has been taken without the owner's consent and wrongfully parked; and secondly if the car is owned by a car rental business and is rented at the time of the offence. The Bill would add a third exemption—if the car was under the control of a repair garage.

I accept that there are some deficiencies in the drafting of the Bill. It will be necessary to find a satisfactory definition of the term "a vehicle repair garage", but I believe that that problem could easily be solved. It will also be necessary—I believe that the Bill may not yet be strong enough to do this—to be sure that responsibility rests firmly with the repair garage if it is transferred away from the owner. In other words, the repair garage will ultimately be found responsible as at present it is not. I accept that some changes will be needed if the Bill is to achieve that. I also accept that another way in which to solve the problem would be to deal with it as part of a more comprehensive review of the 1991 Act, which a number of people feel is due.

The problem does not affect many people at present, but it has the potential to do so. People who take their car to a garage to be repaired could be caught by the existing provisions, which have recently been stiffened by the result of a court case involving a Miss Francis and Wandsworth borough council. It went through various stages and eventually reached the Court of Appeal. The court's interpretation was more inflexible than previous interpretations and made it more difficult for local authorities to exercise their discretion.

Without wishing to breach the integrity of the existing parking system in London which, by and large, works efficiently and well, and while accepting that this problem is on the margins, I believe that there is a sufficient injustice here that needs to be remedied. What is happening at the moment is an affront to natural justice, because people who have no guilt are being found guilty. For that reason, I hope that the Bill will be given a good hearing by the House.

2.26 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) and to the Minister for my late arrival.

Although we have every sympathy with what the hon. Member for Beckenham is attempting to do, we feel that the Bill is rather badly drafted, in that it could mean that neither the owner of the car nor the garage was found liable for any penalty charge imposed. We are concerned that a complex bureaucratic situation could be created. I know a little about the problem—

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): A little knowledge is dangerous.

Ms Jackson: "A little learning" is, I think, the exact phrase.

One of my constituents suffered the fate described by the hon. Member for Beckenham. He left his car outside the garage for necessary repair and, unfortunately, received a penalty charge because the parking restrictions came into force half an hour after he had left the car and deposited the keys in the garage. The possibility of bureaucratic difficulty, given that there are variables in parking zones throughout the 33 London boroughs, leads the Opposition to believe that, far from improving the situation, the Bill would make it extraordinarily worse.

The charge is never more than £20 or £30. I believe that under existing legislation, a driver can attempt to claim the money from the garage.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I had hoped to make a speech in this debate, but as that seems unlikely, I shall make my point now. I was charged £30 when a garage had control of my car. When I failed to pay the £30 because I was remonstrating about it, the fine was increased to £60, and while I was still in correspondence on the subject, it went up to £90. It is not, therefore, true to say that the fine is only £20 or £30. It is monstrous that someone who is not in control of the car and who has committed it to a garage should be fined when it is in no way his fault.

Ms Jackson: The hon. Gentleman has my every sympathy. I can well understand that he feels somewhat irate, but he should understand that such a provision would open the door to the possibility that someone other than the owner of the car—be they family or friend—could be using it and could fall outside the remit of the Bill if a penalty charge were incurred for parking in a zone where parking was not allowed.

My final point relates to the number of appeals that have been lodged. I understand that the figures are kept by individual London boroughs. We received replies from Ministers to the effect that no such figures were kept centrally and obtaining them would be prohibitive, but I understand that there have been only six such cases in the past year—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 25 April.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 25 April.

FIRE SAFETY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Second Reading what day? No day named.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 25 April.

BUILDING SOCIETIES (DISTRIBUTIONS) BILL

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House—[*Mr. French.*]

Question agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment; read the Third time, and passed.

DANGEROUS DOGS (AMENDMENT) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You are aware that this Bill has been through another place on two separate occasions, has been considered by a House of Lords Select Committee and, in part at least, contains the recommendations of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. Today, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary wrote to me to the effect that the Home Office could not approve the Bill, important though it is, because he is still considering the findings of the Select Committee on Home Affairs. That report was lodged with the Home Secretary before Christmas and it is now mid-February.

I require your assistance, Madam Deputy Speaker, because 28 February is the last day in this Parliament when such Bills can be considered. Will you, through Madam Speaker, exercise the traditional duty of the Speaker and protect the privileges of Back Benchers, by ensuring that the Home Secretary responds to the Select Committee report in time for that response to be considered before 28 February?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not think that the Chair has any official standing on the matter, but no doubt the remarks will have been heard in the correct places.

UNITED KINGDOM MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (REFERENDUM) BILL

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BRITISH NATIONALITY (HONG KONG) BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE BILL

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

SEA FISHERIES (SHELLFISH) (AMENDMENT) BILL [*LORDS*]

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Wallace.*]

Question agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment; read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

HUMAN TISSUE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [7 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 28 February.

DISABLED PERSONS AND CARERS (SHORT-TERM BREAKS) BILL

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

WELFARE OF BROILER CHICKENS BILL [*LORDS*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

DIGNITY AT WORK BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 28 February.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 19th February, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), the Speaker shall not later than Ten o'clock put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Lilley relating to Pensions and to Social Security.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

PLANNING (CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*]

Ordered,

That, the Planning (Consequential Provisions) (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* shall be proceeded with as if it was a consolidation bill and Standing Order No. 58A (Consolidation bills) shall apply.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Architecture

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

2.38 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): In this debate, the House has a brief moment to consider the state of architecture in our country. I stand to be corrected, but I do not think that it is a subject to which the House has paid much attention in recent years. I have a lifelong interest in it, which is why I asked for this Adjournment debate.

As I walk through our city streets, drive through our towns and go along our roads, so little of what has been built in recent years cheers the soul. If architecture should, as Goethe put it, be frozen music, too much of what has been built today is mush and slush, unpleasing to the eye and out of harmony with nature and the spirit. We have the greatest corps of architects in the world here in Britain, but their greatness is recognised more in other countries.

Britain has one of the greatest public architectural heritages. For two and a half centuries, from the days of Inigo Jones, through Hawksmoor, Nash, Wren, Pugin and Barry, to the confident statements of imperial Britain, British public building had measure and feel to it. That is not the case today. What has gone wrong?

The official rhetoric of the Government is to praise something called UK plc, as if the people and creativity of a whole nation were reducible to a limited company. I am sure that the Minister of State, Department of National Heritage will draw the House's attention to success stories in modern building in this country, but if he is honest, he will admit that too much of modern architecture, as commissioned by the public authorities, is an affront against aesthetics.

I am glad that the Minister of State is to reply because, without a lead from the top of public life, there can be no hope for British architecture. In a sense, I chose the Minister to reply to this debate—a rare privilege for a Back Bencher. Once I had been granted the debate, a Minister from either the Department of the Environment or the Department of National Heritage could have replied, but when I made it clear that it would be about the aesthetics of buildings the Department of the Environment said, "Ah, that is for the Department of National Heritage."

The Minister is a distinguished translator of Pushkin and he will understand what I mean when I say that recent Ministers, especially the present Cabinet, have been "nie kulturny". The crude translation from the Russian is "uncultured", but the real meaning is a lack of sense and sensibility about what matters in public life. Architecture is about proportion, scale and harmony and even the strongest supporters of the Government would agree that those three concepts have not been part of the philosophy of state administration for two decades or more. This meretricious Government, who designed such legislation as the poll tax and the present crime and police Bills, are incapable of constructing policies that result in good architecture.

Architecture cannot be a matter for private concern. It is the only art form that is a permanent public event. All other art is a private matter of choice and discretion. I can

choose whether to go to a play or concert and only I decide whether I will read a poem or watch television, but the theatre, the concert hall, the library and the broadcasting centre are part of the public domain. Their architecture, by definition, impacts on us all, and the public authorities, in the broadest sense, cannot avoid their responsibilities.

According to the Library, each year the British state spends more than £5 billion on public works. I expect that if one counted in all the building commissioned by Ministers, local government, quangos, agencies and other public bodies directly or indirectly financed by the taxpayer or lottery money, the figure would be considerably higher. Each bus stop, motorway bridge and housing association bungalow is financed with our money. Of course we want value for that money, but the bad design and the downgrading of the architects' input cost money, as the monstrous bill for continually repairing that part of the national estate built to the lowest common design denominator on cost grounds in the past four decades now shows. We have the right and the duty to ask that design and aesthetics should again be put at the top of the agenda for public building.

We need demanding patrons—clients, in the modern jargon—who demand high standards and not simply low costs. It is sometimes forgotten that Aneurin Bevan was Minister of Housing as well as Minister of Health in that great Government of renewal in 1945. He resisted the urge to build as quickly and as cheaply as possible through the lowering of standards and specifications. In 1947 Bevan said:

> "At this moment we are going to be judged by the number of houses that we build. In 10 years' time, we shall be judged by the kind of house that we build, and I am not going to be panicked into doing a bad job."

All public bodies, not Ministries alone, must have the confidence to become great patrons again.

If our cities had dynamic and popularly elected leaders, or if our government was not the most centralised in the world, city and regional leaders working with private architects and designers could create a style that was true to their local culture, history and economy, and to the needs of their people.

The new generation of patrons that I hope will take shape in the public sphere must not be frightened of the vulgar philistine criticism that greets any innovative design. I have no doubt that, when the then Prince of Wales built the wonderful Brighton pavilion 200 years ago, some wiseacre described it as a "monstrous carbuncle". Today it is a joy to behold—unlike the supremely forgettable facade of the extension to the national gallery.

A confident patron and a demanding client are not enough. There are also specific measures that could help to encourage a new culture of confident and attractive public architecture. The first is simple enough: accept the need for an architect.

In my region of Yorkshire we have what is widely considered one of the worst-designed public buildings in Europe—the national health service administration centre, Quarry house in Leeds. I cannot hold up a picture of it, Madam Deputy Speaker, because even in a debate of this nature we are not allowed visual aids. However, I have the National Audit Office's damning report on its construction, produced a year ago.

The most revealing aspect of the report is the fact that nowhere in it is the word "architect" mentioned. The basis for the construction of Quarry house was the idea of getting a building up as quickly and cheaply as possible. The NAO report says that the Department's project team

> "had no previous experience of construction work but arranged relevant training."

Arranged relevant training? Did they become latter-day Christopher Wrens by going on an awayday course set up by another Department?

The idea is ludicrous. The ladies and gentlemen of Whitehall, with no previous experience, "arranged relevant training" to build a £50 million building that spits in the eye of everyone in Yorkshire. If we want a monument to today's Government approach to architecture, we need look no further than Quarry house. We can no more build buildings without an architect than write poems without a poet.

The first question asked is often, "How much will it cost?" I have no problem with strict budgets, but instead of asking about cost we should say to the architect, "Here is a budget. Design for us a good and noble building that meets the challenge of low lifetime maintenance, energy saving and good design."

We should follow the European practice of holding more open competitions for the design of publicly funded buildings. I know that praying in aid good practice from other parts of the continent is not popular with the Conservative party, but soon we may have a new dispensation that is not frightened to learn from overseas.

At times, competitions may have to be limited by invitation, and perhaps by age, so that tomorrow's Norman Fosters and Richard Rogers may earn recognition in their own country now, before they are too old. Perhaps we could consider, for example, the idea of flat fees for design, instead of a percentage of the final cost, which can lead to inflated fees for architects.

Will someone—the Minister, perhaps—have a word with the Treasury so that the idea of design is built into the rules of the public finance initiative? The cheap alternative that is increasingly becoming the norm is a contractor bidding on what is called a "design and build" basis, using an off-the-shelf model—as if one went through a supermarket looking for a pattern book from which to choose a design.

Those of us who saw the British pavilion at the Seville Expo in Spain will recall its impact. Its architect, Nicholas Grimshaw, went on to produce what I consider to be the finest piece of public transport architecture in recent years—the Eurostar terminal at Waterloo. It is a shame that that cannot easily be seen, because vista and landscape are not given enough consideration either. I am pleased to say that the Eurostar terminal at Waterloo was constructed largely using British steel, much of which was produced in my constituency.

The tender has been issued for the 1998 Lisbon Expo on the basis of design and build, so no British architect will fly the flag for British creativity and talent. The Ministry of Defence is particularly bad in that regard: it always seems to award contracts on a design and build basis on the grounds of speed and cost, scouring the Yellow Pages for the cheapest offer. Alas, the MOD is the lead body responsible for developing the heritage site at Portsmouth—the so-called Gun wharf—on the basis of

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

a design and build contract which, judging from experience, is unlikely to fire the imagination or to do justice to the wonderful history of the public space concerned.

It does not have to be like that. The design and build project at Nottingham for the Inland Revenue—perhaps it is more confident about spending our money—was scrapped in favour of a competition, which was won by Sir Michael Hopkins, the architect responsible for the commended new parliamentary building above Westminster tube station.

I began my remarks by saying that I had selected the Department of National Heritage to reply to the debate. I did so deliberately, because I believe that one can see the glimmerings of a coherent architectural policy emanating from that Department. To be fair to the Secretary of State for the Environment—although I do not know why I should be so generous, as he is invariably rude to me at Question Time and in debate—he is probably sensitive to these issues. However, he sits in a Cabinet of philistines in a value-free and vision-free Downing street where he has little influence.

Despite its ghastly name, the Department of National Heritage has at least sought, in allocating lottery funds through various boards, to insist that good design is built in at the beginning of projects being commissioned. I understand that we owe that provision to the foresight of the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), to whom we pay credit. However, ministerial fiat, based on the lucky and unusual chance of having a cultured Conservative Minister, is not enough. All Ministries and public bodies that commission buildings in the public sphere should be obliged to make good design the first rule rather than an add-on extra.

Perhaps we need—my suggestion is a little tongue in cheek—an "Ofarch", headed by an architectural Chris Woodhead, to lay down standards and rattle the cages of complacency in public architecture. On balance, I am not sure whether the profession could decide which of its members is today's Sir Christopher Wren—they are modest men and women. In any case, with the departure of Baroness Thatcher, the age of omniscient supremos is over—at least for the time being. If the Chancellor can have a panel of expert advisers on the economy, could we not have a panel of architects charged with advising Ministries and municipalities and encouraging them to support innovation and imagination in public building?

Britain has a wonderful history of great architecture, which has been publicly led. However, in the past 20 years, Governments—I do not exempt Labour Governments—have abdicated responsibility in that area. Privately commissioned building has followed the public lead, and alas we have witnessed a dulling and downgrading of the physical essence of our country. I make no pleas for architects or new money in this debate; I plead simply for public policy that is well designed in the building sphere. Our architects and designers are very talented and their creativity is world class. The duty of government should be to unleash that creativity, but this Government have stifled it. New architecture needs a new Government.

2.53 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for allowing me to contribute to the debate. I shall take only a moment. The hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) made a fascinating speech—it reminded me of the Brighton pavilion, of which Sydney Smith said it was as if St. Paul's had gone down to the sea and pupped, because the hon. Gentleman was all over the place. However, he made some extremely telling points. I was sorry that he took so many personal swipes at people, but that is part of the cut and thrust of political life.

Public architecture since the war has gone through a rather barren period. There are some notable exceptions, of which Richmond house in Whitehall is one. On the whole, however, there is not a great deal of which one can be inordinately proud.

We can have unreserved pride in one building, however, and that is this one—the greatest public building of the 19th century. The hon. Member for Rotherham referred to Michael Hopkins, who is a great architect, and to the fact that the House has commissioned him to build our new parliamentary building. I hope that, just as this set the standards for great public buildings in the second half of the last century, as we near the end of this century and move into the next, the Michael Hopkins building will set the example for well-ordered, good-mannered architecture—architecture that respects its surroundings and the skyline, which has been so disfigured and defaced by unthinking architecture in the past 30, 40 and 50 years. I hope that we in Parliament will, therefore, be able to take the lead in setting an example for good public building for the 21st century.

2.55 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I thank the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) for introducing the subject of the debate. It is an interesting subject and he made an extremely interesting speech about it. It is a shame that it has to be raised on the Adjournment of the House, when there is not the opportunity for discussion. It is a pity that this is not some sort of Bill, so that we could have a lengthy Committee stage, with lots of giving ways and ideas being tossed about. As you said earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker, no doubt the right people will have heard these remarks. My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) from the Whips Office is sitting on the Front Bench. Perhaps she can arrange for us to have a good, in-depth and detailed debate on this truly important subject.

There are periods when people seem to care about their architecture and others when they do not. There are always isolated examples of great monumental buildings, but the architecture that really affects people's lives is on a more modest and more widespread scale. There was a golden age of British architecture from perhaps mid-Victorian times—this splendid building is an example, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said—until the eve of the first world war. It produced the great offices of state, the national museums and the churches in the new suburbs. My hon. Friend will remember that we talked about the conservation fund for churches the other day.

The hon. Member for Rotherham kindly made some remarks that, in the context of debates as elections come close, were as near adulation as the Opposition will ever

admit to—namely that the Department of National Heritage has a sensible policy for architecture. I am grateful to him for those pre-election crumbs of praise.

The Victorian period also produced the rows of attractive terraced houses, which will serve us for many years to come. If the industrial revolution produced the back-to-back slums, which in most cases have now been consigned to history, it also produced the estates built by the Peabody Trust and others to give poorer people a quality of housing that they could hardly otherwise have dreamed of.

The inter-war years too produced many fine buildings, including a flowering of municipal architecture throughout the country—such gems as the Hoover factory and Charles Holden's stations for the London Underground.

Generally speaking, the post-war years failed to rediscover that enthusiasm for good architecture. Understandably, we were in a hurry to rebuild. Resources were scarce, and emphasis was put on efficiency of construction, rather than on fine aesthetics. There was a reaction against the flamboyance of Victorian Gothic, epitomised in the no-frills approach of the modern movement. There was also an increase in scale which seems, for a while, to have outrun the ability of architects to absorb it into the urban fabric, with the result that we had a rash of faceless tower blocks and cliffs of monotonous office facades dominating our streets. Perhaps that period should make us extremely cautious of adopting a centralised policy for architecture.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that that was a generation of architecture without merit. English Heritage, in carrying out its thematic surveys of post-war buildings, identified many worthy of close examination and a modest number which were sufficiently distinctive to be candidates for listing.

In recent years there has been a remarkable upsurge of public interest in architecture. It was given particular emphasis in the early 1980s by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his views, there can be no doubt that he struck a chord with many people who felt that the architecture of the previous 20 years had been heading down a blind alley.

The debate has continued, with all the major newspapers running architectural pages, and headline exposure given to items such as Norman Foster's millennium tower, Daniel Libeskind's extension to the Victoria and Albert museum, or Gabrielle Bramante's tiff with the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which did not like what she produced for it. I welcome the increasing interest in architecture, which must result in a demand for higher standards, and the establishment of a network of regional architecture centres, where ordinary people can find out about current projects and proposed developments.

The hon. Member for Rotherham spoke particularly of public bodies. Here again, the record is mixed. Round the corner from here is No. 2 Marsham street; few will lament its passing. By contrast, just up the road we have Whitfield's Richmond house, which my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) mentioned: a distinctive Government building of the 1980s which will bear comparison with any of its neighbours in Whitehall.

Further afield, many people believe that we had a narrow escape in Nottingham, where an undistinguished design was put aside at the last minute in favour of a design competition. The result was the Inland Revenue headquarters by Sir Michael Hopkins, which has been widely acclaimed both for its architecture and for its innovative system of natural ventilation. In Leeds, as it seems to many, including the hon. Member for Rotherham, there was no such reprieve: Quarry house has attracted widespread criticism and stands as a monument to insensitive development.

Those projects demonstrate two of the principal risks to which any building design—especially for a Government building—is exposed. The first risk is that key decisions are taken by very senior people who may have little understanding of the practicalities of a building project. They may take far-reaching decisions without fully appreciating their impact. They need early and expert advice. At Quarry house there was an early decision on the amount of floor space to be squeezed on to the site, with the result that the bulk of the building was excessive and any architect would have had difficulty fitting a building into the scale of the area.

The second risk, which may also arise from uninformed decisions, is that the time allowed is often unreasonably short. In both of those projects a design-build approach was adopted to save time. Design-build can produce an excellent building in the right circumstances, but it must be chosen for the right reasons.

The timetable for Nottingham did not allow time for a proper appraisal of alternative design proposals. It was only when the then Minister, Francis Maude, who I hope will return to the House shortly, took a personal interest that the tight timetable was relaxed and time was found for alternative designs to be considered.

How can we improve the chances of success? The Royal Fine Art Commission, a body that is sponsored by my Department and one of whose roles is to encourage higher standards of architecture, has advocated that every major Government building should bear the name of the Minister who commissioned it. I am not sure that I would agree with that.

That is not the slightest reflection on the aesthetic judgments of Ministers in this distinguished Government, but because of the simple and practical point that Ministers move on, and few would see a major building through from inception to completion; but we tend to push responsibility too far down the ladder. There should be a very senior person—a project champion—to take personal responsibility for a project, and take credit, or the reverse, for the quality of the finished building.

Major buildings are, in future, likely to be commissioned under the private finance initiative. That will introduce new problems, and we are trying to address them positively. The basic principle is that public bodies will procure services rather than assets. Thus, for example, a Department will not commission an office building, but will sign a contract for the provision of office space, leaving the supplier to decide how best to provide it. However, a major public body must retain responsibility for what is done to the built environment in its name. The public client will therefore wish to ensure that its chosen supplier understands the process of design and regards architectural quality as important, and is determined that the building and its associated setting will make an improvement to the public realm.

[Mr. Iain Sproat]

My Department is working with the PFI executive to prepare best practice guidance on how a requirement for high architectural quality may best be built into a PFI project. I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye felt her heart sink when the hon. Member for Rotherham said that we should give advice to the Treasury, knowing the intense, almost unreasonable difficulty involved. For once, since no money but mere quality is involved, I think that I can say that the Treasury will accept that. Perhaps it is dangerous even to say that. I hope that it will accept that quality must be built into PFI arrangements.

We already have experience of good design under PFI arrangements. The Royal Armouries has obtained what is widely agreed to be an excellent new museum in Leeds. Although I have not visited it, I am told that it has added a distinguished building to a key site in the city, one of which we can be proud.

Another area with great potential for public architecture is the national lottery. On Monday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage opened the exhibition of lottery projects at the Royal Institute of British Architects. The visit happily coincided with the day when the total raised for good causes by the lottery passed £3 billion. The potential of the national lottery to extend architectural patronage is enormous and the 24 arts and sports projects in the exhibition demonstrate that architectural quality at the appropriate level is a prime component of a successful lottery project.

We held a seminar last year for lottery distributors, to share their experiences in how best to encourage design quality. They re-emphasised that architectural success is the result of a close partnership between an informed client and a skilled architect. It is crucial therefore that a client, who may have had little to do with building projects, can find advice. The distributors already run a programme of conferences, workshops and road shows to make early contact with potential applicants.

I hope that our handbook on architectural competitions will help. Published last year, it was deliberately written for the promoter who has little experience of such matters. Design competitions have the great merit of offering a range of creative proposals, and they have a record of bringing forward promising young architects who might otherwise find it difficult to make their mark. However, they are expensive in abortive effort and are not always appropriate. Sadly, they also have a record of intemperate accusations and recriminations.

Our new handbook recognises the equal validity of appointing an architect by competitive interview. That approach gets the architect and the client working together from the beginning, and has also produced excellent results. The inspiration comes from the architect, not from the method of selection.

Finally, I should say a word about the world squares initiative, not just because Parliament square, Whitehall and Trafalgar square are local issues for the House, but because architecture is about places as much as buildings. I hope that the means can be found to control traffic so that people can enjoy the experience of those two great squares. I hope that architects in other cities will recognise that every building helps to create a place that will be important to more people than will ever use the building.

I hope that I have said enough to demonstrate our commitment to improving the architecture of the public realm. It will not be easy, because money is always tight. We should not underestimate the courage required for a public servant to invest in quality. However, good design is not necessarily more expensive. The Broadgate complex achieved high architectural quality within tight cost limits. In a different field, Hampshire county architects, under Sir Colin Stansfield Smith, have produced a succession of excellent schools to standard cost allowances.

Good architecture is a sound investment, but it needs both a good architect and a knowledgeable and committed client. We know that we have good architects: British architecture has a high international reputation. I hope that our public bodies will match them, and play their part as enlightened clients.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 17 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Unemployment

1. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about unemployment in Wales. [14440]

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): Unemployment is falling fast in Wales. It has fallen by 9,200 in the past three months.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that one reason for unemployment in Wales falling, while it is rising in Germany, is the export of jobs from Germany to Wales? Does he remember the forecast by Commissioner Delors that our opt-out from the social chapter would act as a magnet for inward investment into Britain? Does he believe that unemployment in Wales would continue to fall if we adopted the social chapter and a national minimum wage?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend, as ever, makes some very good points. At least 50 German companies operate in Wales, and some of those have moved operations from Germany to Wales. Unemployment in Wales is now lower than it is in Germany; no Labour Secretary of State for Wales has ever been able to say that.

My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the social chapter. Some other countries in Europe have restrictions on overtime and other excessive regulations about how people work, which inhibit job creation. It defies belief that Opposition Members want those countries to decide our labour laws by majority vote instead of our deciding them ourselves.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that if new industries are to come to Wales we must create the right environment? What does he intend to do about the Environment Agency, which is not responding to the people of the Rhondda in relation to the disposal of waste at the Nant-y-gwyddion tip? If we are to attract industry to the valleys, we must have a proper environment. Throughout south Wales, companies are looking critically at the environment in which they are investing.

Mr. Hague: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of the environment; that is why environmental policies have been among my priorities since I have held office as Secretary of State. I recognise the concerns expressed by the local community in the hon. Gentleman's constituency about a matter on which he has corresponded with my Department. It is for the Environment Agency to consider what action is appropriate, and it is difficult for me to comment further in view of my appellate role under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make further representations, we shall be happy to consider them.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the high priority that he gave in his speech on Friday to continuing job creation under the next Conservative Government has been very warmly welcomed in Wales? Is it not clear that the choice facing the electorate is between a Conservative Government giving that high priority to job creation and a Labour Government who, judging by experience, will end their term with more unemployed than when it began?

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have made the British economy the best job creation machine in Europe by a very long way. Employment in Wales has gone up by 95,000 in the past 10 years. That is a tremendous record. My right hon. Friend understandably refers to the Labour party, because every Labour Government have left office with unemployment higher than when they entered it.

Mr. Llwyd: Is the Minister aware of the level of youth unemployment in some areas of Wales? For example, in some parts of Gwynedd it is more than 33 per cent. among under-25s. What initiatives are his Department pursuing to deal with that terrible problem?

Mr. Hague: I am pleased that youth unemployment has been falling with overall unemployment. We all want that trend to continue. The key to removing youth unemployment is improving standards of education and training. That is why in the past two weeks I have launched updates to the Welsh Office's policies on education and training, the bright future initiative and the people and prosperity programme. It is also why I have moved so much of the training budget into youth training, especially the expansion of modern apprenticeships. Many thousands of young people will benefit from that later this year.

Mr. Richards: Does my right hon. Friend agree that while the French enjoyed the rub of the green at the Parc des Princes on Saturday, they suffer from the green rub of European employment policies? Will he confirm that the average rate of unemployment in France is much higher than that in Wales and that every constituency in Wales has a lower rate of unemployment than Germany? Does he agree that no Welsh rugby supporter would exchange his job for being unemployed in France?

Mr. Hague: We do not have quite so much to celebrate on the rugby field as we did at the previous Welsh Question Time, but my hon. Friend is right to mention the unemployment rate in France. On the entirely comparable International Labour Organisation unadjusted basis, unemployment in the autumn of last year was 8.2 per cent. in Wales and 12.8 per cent. in France. Since then,

unemployment has been falling in Wales. That shows what happens when policies favourable to job creation are pursued, as they are in this country, and when policies that are not favourable to job creation are pursued, as happens in many parts of continental Europe.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Secretary of State may deceive himself, but he does not deceive Opposition Members with those figures. Will he confirm that we still have 200,000 fewer people in employment than when the present Prime Minister took office and that the claimant count includes some 30,000 young people under the age of 25? Does he not realise that we can never have a prosperous economy or secure society when so many young people are denied the opportunity to work? Is he aware that the Government's greatest failure has been their refusal to prepare for the future? That is why at the forthcoming general election, there will be so much popular support for Labour's programme for a windfall levy to fund an imaginative programme of work for the young.

Mr. Hague: Whatever figures the hon. Gentleman chooses to consider, unemployment in Wales is falling—and falling rapidly. It does not matter what definition of unemployment is taken, internationally comparable or not, unemployment is falling rapidly in the United Kingdom, and there is a reason for that—the policies that we have pursued in recent years. Employment is up in Wales by 95,000 over the past 10 years and we are doing an immense amount in Wales to ensure that young people are prepared for the future—the very point that I made in answer to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). Standards of educational qualifications are increasing, the number of young people in high quality training is rising steadily, and so is the number of jobs available for them to go to when they finish it.

Nursery Vouchers

2. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many recent submissions he has received in favour of the introduction of nursery vouchers. [14441]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): No specific submissions have been received by my right hon. Friend. Applications for registration from more than 400 establishments in the private and voluntary sectors illustrate our view that the scheme will give parents a real choice in the education that they want for their four-year-olds.

Mr. Flynn: That was a typically disgraceful non-answer. Does the Minister recall that he has already revealed that the total number of submissions that he received in favour was one while the number against was some 4,500 plus 60 petitions? Does that not explain the desperation of the Prime Minister, who is so opposed to democracy and choice in Wales that at the weekend he described political opponents as dogs? Does that not show that he is against any sort of democracy or vote in Wales because he will come out badly in the general election and in the vote on devolution? That is why he is trying to deny Wales a vote on devolution. The people of Wales have spoken 5,000 to one to say that nursery vouchers are unnecessary in Wales because we have a splendid record of achievement on nursery education. They are therefore unnecessary, unwanted and wasteful.

Mr. Evans: The opponent of choice is the hon. Gentleman, who made it clear at Question Time a month ago that he is opposed to the assisted places scheme. He has also made it very clear that he is opposed to our nursery voucher scheme, which is all about extending choice. To take up his point about the number of submissions—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) would listen for a minute, he might learn something. If he is interested in the number of parents in Wales who are responding positively to the nursery vouchers scheme—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says "One", but to date 28,000 parents have made applications for nursery vouchers—that is more than 80 per cent.

The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) refers to the number of submissions sent to the Government. The Government have conceived the concept of nursery vouchers, have taken it through the House and are currently implementing it. It is therefore not at all surprising that people do not write to the Government asking them to introduce the scheme, because we are introducing it already. The hon. Gentleman might ask his hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend whether the Labour party has received submissions in favour of the scheme. Only the other day I received a letter—not from a relative, or even a supporter, but from an uncommitted voter in my constituency who heard what she described as the flippant remarks of the hon. Member for Bridgend and has decided to become a supporter of mine. Perhaps I may invite the hon. Gentleman to come to my constituency more often.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is not nursery education an essential part of the life of all people and especially of children as a preparation for future life? Will not the nursery voucher scheme give parents choice of institution, school, and so on in a way that the Labour party has never liked? The Opposition do not like choice for parents: they like to be able to tell them where to send their children—and that is why they are wrong.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and in the growing decibels from Opposition Members we hear how opposed they are to that choice. The introduction of the nursery voucher scheme is leading to an increase in provision in their own constituencies. We were told by hon. Members from the Flintshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire education authority areas that they already had 100 per cent. provision; yet I learn that the Labour councils in those areas propose an increase from quarter-time to half-time provision, thus doubling provision for four-year-olds in those areas. Only Labour's wonky calculator could double what has already been described as 100 per cent. provision.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I do not think that the calculation is wonky, given that the Government have found about

£3 million to employ a private contractor to run the system when that sum could dramatically increase the number of places in Wales.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman should thank the Government for ensuring that the nursery voucher scheme is making more provision for nursery education in his constituency than was previously being arranged.

Mr. Jones: Rubbish.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman shouts "Rubbish." That illustrates the fact that he is prepared to stand up only for his own Labour local education authority and not for parents in his constituency.

Mr. Richards: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the nursery voucher scheme is conditional on desirable learning outcomes, which will have the effect of raising education standards not only in the maintained sector but in the private and independent sectors?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We already know that pre-school play groups are very much in favour of the scheme; it is interesting that their views are dismissed or not taken into account in the various representations put forward by Opposition Members. Yes, we are concerned to give the private and voluntary sectors the opportunity to offer additional choices to parents. All across Wales, we are seeing increased provision generally—both in the maintained sector and in the private and voluntary sectors—as a result of the scheme. The cacophony of noise from Opposition Members is an illustration of the fact that they have no recognition of parents' wishes in this respect.

Mr. Win Griffiths: There were about 100 people at the conference. If the Minister regards a 1 per cent. response in favour of his nursery voucher scheme as a success, he obviously has a long way to go before his party will be successful in Wales. Is he not also being jesuitical in the extreme in saying that 28,000 responses to the nursery voucher scheme mean parents favour it when in fact if they do not apply for vouchers they will get no education at all for their four-year-olds?

Can the Minister now explain why he has consistently flown in the face of the overwhelming majority in Wales, who regard the nursery voucher scheme as an expensive and unnecessary exercise in right-wing Tory dogma? Is it because, as with so many of their other education policies, the Tories are targeting the needs of the few as against those of the many? Indeed, the Prime Minister admitted that when he said in a speech that the Tory Government had been failing the many since 1979.

Mr. Evans: The representation that the hon. Gentleman received, which he has flippantly dismissed here today, is expressed in these terms: the person concerned, who sent me a copy of her representation, says that she was saddened by the hon. Gentleman's flippant dismissal of the voucher scheme. In fact, all opposition to the scheme has been generated by Opposition Members—

Mr. Morgan: Because we represent the people of Wales.

Mr. Evans: The fact is that the hon. Member for Bridgend is happy with the previous position, which allowed very limited nursery provision in Wales. Provision is now increasing and being extended, allowing much more variety in both private and voluntary sector provision. Opposition Members are wholly opposed to choice of that kind.

Cardiff International Airport (Link Road)

3. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much financial support the Welsh Office is providing for the design stage of the proposed link road with Cardiff international airport. [14442]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): A total of £1,125,000 this year and next.

Mr. Sweeney: May I take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Transport, and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, for their recent visits to Cardiff international airport? Those visits gave them a chance to see at first hand the enormous strides that have been made there, and the enormous investment that has taken place since privatisation and since TBI took over. Will my hon. Friend look hard at the whole question of funds for the airport and bear in mind the vital necessity of financing the construction stage of the road? Up to £40 million worth of development at the airport depends on that funding, which would also provide a considerable boost for Barry.

Mr. Jones: I very much agree with the thrust of my hon. Friend's question. I, too, have visited Cardiff international airport more than once, and I share my hon. Friend's view of the vibrancy, excitement and positive, outward-going nature of TBI's management of it. I look forward to the continuing expansion of air services there.

On the second part of my hon. Friend's question, I am content that the £800,000 with which Vale of Glamorgan borough council has most recently been provided will enable it to carry out the necessary work on phase 1 of the new road, of which I know that my hon. Friend is such a supporter, and to investigate further the feasibility of phase 2.

Hospitals (Dyfed Powys)

4. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received concerning the future of hospitals in the Dyfed Powys area. [14443]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Various.

Mr. Dafis: I shall do my best to restrain my usual tendency to behave like a yapping dog, Madam Speaker; I am sure that you will keep a tight leash on my colleagues and me.

What message can the Minister give me to convey tomorrow night to the people of Aberaeron, who have been meeting to discuss how they can protect their community hospital? Does he recognise the absurdity of East Dyfed health authority's proposal to close eight community hospitals and to cut district general hospitals in order to save £11 million over four years? Would it not

be far more sensible for the Welsh Office to provide the necessary funds to enable the health authority, the trusts and the general practitioners together to come up with a rational strategy for health care, rather than being driven by crisis management and making decisions that they will regret in a few years' time?

Mr. Jones: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, references to Aberaeron or any other community hospital in Dyfed Powys are purely speculative at the moment and I hope that he will not exaggerate the tendency to speculate. To put in perspective the point that he was trying to make, Dyfed Powys is a prudent health authority. It is anxious that when it projects forward five years it sees an overspending tendency representing less than three-quarters of 1 per cent. of its likely expenditure in the next five years, which is £1.5 billion. That is the order of overspending that it envisages. It is a very prudent health authority, which seeks to ensure that it remains within budget so that, ideally, it has headroom for the further expansion that it wants.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, since 1979, the Government have increased national health spending in Wales by 85 per cent.? Has he heard from the Labour Front Bench any pledge similar to the one given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and the Prime Minister that year on year the national health service will have more funding in real terms? There has been silence from the Labour Front Bench on that.

Mr. Jones: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In line with our previous promises, we have consistently increased spending on the health service in Wales by exactly the figure that he quotes. His researches are correct and to the point. We have continued to give that pledge: we have said that throughout the next Parliament we shall continue to increase spending on the health service in real terms each year.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the ominous silence from the Labour Benches. Labour Members have made no response to match our commitment. We can only suspect that all their spending pledges—not least the Welsh Assembly—will be paid for by taking money from the health service in Wales.

Nurses and Midwives

5. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of nurses and midwives who have left their professions in each of the past six years in Wales. [14444]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Touhig: Given that it costs £5,000 to replace every nurse who leaves the national health service in Wales, will the Minister explain why the Government have allowed the number of nurses and midwives employed by the health service in Wales to fall by almost 3,500 in the past six years? Does not that turnover place a massive financial burden on the health service and demonstrate the Government's complete failure to improve the morale of those dedicated carers?

Mr. Jones: I very much recognise the contribution that nurses and midwives make to the national health service in Wales, but I do not necessarily recognise the picture that the hon. Gentleman would wish to paint. Since 1979, there has been a 27 per cent. increase in the number of nurses and midwives employed by the national health service in Wales. He may wish to welcome especially the fact that the number of nurses in training this year has been increased by 25 per cent. and the fact that we have committed expenditure to increase that by a further 11 per cent. in the next financial year.

Mr. Fabricant: If the Government had introduced a minimum working wage and abolished competitive tendering in the national health service, would we have been able to increase the number of midwives and nurses in Wales by 27 per cent. since 1979?

Mr. Jones: Clearly, competitive tendering has helped significantly in taking out unnecessary expenditure and allowing that money to be used at the bedside, where it is most important and where it has contributed significantly to the continuing increase in the number of patients treated. I know that this subject can be bedevilled by statistics, but it is worth remembering the remarkable achievement of the national health service in Wales, which treats 60 per cent. more patients in Welsh hospitals than it did in 1979.

Dr. Howells: Is the Minister aware that one of the great problems with the loss of professional nurses is that some of our specialist departments have lost some of their most valuable staff? Those include physiotherapists working at Talygarn in my constituency, and other similar institutions, which have done sterling work over the years in helping to heal victims of strokes and car crashes. How does the Minister intend to ensure that places such as Talygarn, with such great records, continue into the future so that those professionals can find places to train?

Mr. Jones: I share the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question, and I agree with what he says about Talygarn. We are considering the generality of specialist areas, including coronary care and intensive treatment units, at the moment. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that we have already committed an extra £800,000 to the initiative for registered sick children's nurses, and we are increasing that by a further £250,000.

Mr. Morgan: Is it any wonder that nurses are leaving the NHS in droves when the present ludicrously unequal pay system has left them struggling to get a 3 per cent. rise while one NHS trust has increased the pay of its chief executive from £80,000 to £91,000 this year—an increase of 14.5 per cent? Is that not yet another example of the NHS being run for the benefit of the few and not of the many?

Mr. Jones: I know that all my right hon. and hon. Friends will have spotted the glaring omission: the hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to come back to the Dispatch Box and tell us about Labour's intention to match our commitment to increasing real spending on the health service. Nurses and midwives at least have the security of knowing that we shall continue to increase that money in real terms; they can have no such confidence in the Labour party.

Income Statistics

6. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on income levels per head for (a) Carmarthenshire, (b) Wales and (c) the United Kingdom. [14445]

Mr. Hague: There are no official data on income per head in Carmarthenshire—*[Interruption.]* However—if the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) has stopped chuntering—in April 1996 the average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees in Carmarthenshire, Wales and the UK were £303.70, £313.00 and £350.20, respectively.

Mr. Williams: Despite the picture that the Secretary of State likes to paint of the Welsh economy, is not the reality under-employment and low economic activity, with hundreds of thousands of well-paid full-time jobs lost and replaced by part-time low-paid jobs? Over the past 20 years, have we not suffered a double whammy, with Britain falling from 13th to 19th place in the world prosperity league and Wales falling to the bottom of the British regional league?

Mr. Hague: The picture that I have always painted of the Welsh economy is of an economy that went through an extremely difficult time in the 1970s and 1980s in adjusting to different patterns of industry. Part of the picture that I painted is the fact that that adjustment is being successfully made, with many new 21st century industries coming into Wales, offering employment in aerospace, electronics, semiconductors, and so on. The latest Confederation of British Industry "Regional Trends" survey showed that business confidence in Wales rose faster than in any other region in the recent period surveyed. There is an extremely optimistic future for the Welsh economy, which is bringing more and more people into employment, including full-time and well-paid employment.

Mr. Wigley: I am sorry to yap on, but low wages in Wales are a national scandal: there are people earning just £2 an hour. After the Conservative party has been in government for 18 years, how can the Secretary of State explain the fact that income per head in Wales has dropped from 92 per cent. of the UK average to 83 per cent. and what does he intend to do about it?

Mr. Hague: We can bandy statistics for a long time, but the hon. Gentleman knows full well what I and the Government are doing to bring ever-increasing economic prosperity to Wales. I pointed out earlier that employment has risen by 95,000 over the past 10 years. The hon. Gentleman knows that I recently announced new initiatives to bring increased employment to those parts of Wales which have not yet significantly benefited from inward investment, including parts of his constituency. He knows that a great deal is under way, and I know that the introduction of policies involving a minimum wage and signing up to the social chapter would reverse that progress rather than help it.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: What does my right hon. Friend think the people of Wales would expect to be the income per head of the Welsh Liberal party, which has been conspicuous by its absence from Welsh Question Time today?

Mr. Hague: The income per head must be considerable, as it always takes those hon. Members away from the House. However, I have little ministerial responsibility for that matter.

Mr. Ron Davies: I do not understand why the Secretary of State constantly refuses to recognise the reality of the economy in Wales. Did not last year's Welsh Development Agency corporate plan confirm that after 18 years of Conservative government family incomes in Wales are at 77 per cent. of the UK average and at a record low level? Is not the most devastating impact of that to be seen in rural Wales, in counties such as Carmarthenshire, Powys, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion? Given that the Government policy of cutting hill livestock compensatory allowances and the shambles over BSE have been major contributory factors to rural poverty, should the Minister not be doing something about those matters, which are his direct ministerial responsibility, rather than acting as an apologist for the dirty deals that are going on in Northern Ireland? Is it not a disgrace that whole counties have been blighted for decades but all that he is interested in is buying a few more weeks in office for an incompetent and disintegrating Government?

Mr. Hague: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to talk about reality, he should look at what has really happened in the countryside. The Government's commitment to agriculture and to the rural economy is second to none. We changed the rules on inheritance tax so that family farms and businesses in rural areas could continue to operate. We are introducing rate relief for village shops and post offices, and we introduced the White Paper on rural Wales. The Government are spending £258 million this year in support of agriculture in Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: What about the cost of BSE?

Mr. Hague: As usual, the hon. Gentleman is very badly informed. That expenditure is quite separate from any support for BSE, which is additional to that sum. By criticising the support for BSE, Opposition Members imply that they would not have given the same support to agriculture. As they spread scare stories about BSE in the first place, they bear a good share of the responsibility for that expenditure.

Local Government Finance

7. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from local authorities in respect of the level of settlement for rate support grant. [14447]

Mr. Hague: I met representatives of local government at a meeting of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance on 16 December, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State met representatives of police authorities in Wales on 10 January. I received about 28 written representations and I took them all into account when making my final decisions, which were approved by the House on 4 February.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Secretary of State realise that the revenue support grant settlement is little short of a

disaster for local government in Wales? Is there not a contradiction between the Government's claims about a booming economy and the simultaneous cuts and skimping on essential services, such as education and social services, run by local authorities? Does he appreciate that the people will soon have an opportunity to give their verdict on the Government's sense of priorities? I have little doubt what their verdict will be.

Mr. Hague: It is no good the hon. Gentleman's criticising the local government settlement when Labour Front Benchers have committed the Labour party to maintaining the same expenditure in Wales for the next two years. Given that Opposition Members, including the hon. Gentleman, have said that the local government settlement is inadequate, that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) has said that the Welsh Development Agency budget would not be sufficient, and that Labour would have to pay for setting up an assembly, people are beginning to wonder how it is possible to spend more on those items without spending more in total.

Mr. Llew Smith: Does the Secretary of State appreciate the difficulty facing local authorities such as Blaenau Gwent, which has had to make cuts of more than £11 million in 12 months? That authority has the lowest income levels, some of the highest levels of male unemployment, and the worst health problems in Wales. Will he accept that those cuts have put the local authority in an impossible position and are hitting those people who can least afford to withstand that kind of attack?

Mr. Hague: No. I accept that local authorities must make difficult choices between priorities, but that is true of every level of government and it is true every year. Local authorities should be able to make those choices and deliver local services as efficiently as possible. Local residents should ask themselves whether every penny that is spent by a council is spent wisely and whether it is necessary to spend every pound that is spent before asking for more money from central Government.

Health Service Funding

8. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the funding of the health service in Wales in 1996–97 and on his proposals for 1997–98. [14448]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Eleven letters and 27 parliamentary questions.

Mr. Ainger: Did those representations include the concerns expressed by many people throughout Wales about the rocketing costs of GP fundholding management and computers, which total £9.2 million this year alone? Is the Minister aware that, if half that amount were spent on addressing soaring waiting lists, an extra 1,570 hip replacements, 4,600 hernia operations or 5,700 cataract operations could be performed in Wales? Would that not be a far better way to spend scarce national health service resources—on patients—rather than on wasteful, unnecessary and dogma-driven bureaucracy?

Mr. Jones: We are addressing waiting lists. The hon. Gentleman's health authority of Dyfed Powys is making very good use of that money to bring down its waiting lists. Its waiting list of more than 12 months is falling, and its waiting list of more than 18 months is falling significantly. That is better than the Welsh average. He knows full well that we will increase spending on the health service in the coming financial year by 4.1 per cent. Furthermore, we have pledged to increase it every year in the next Parliament by more than the rate of inflation. What is he doing about the ominous silence from his own Front Benchers, who will stick within the spending plans? In the light of their various other commitments, will a Welsh Assembly be paid for out of the national health service in Wales?

Mrs. Clwyd: Is the Minister aware that, 10 years ago, Cynon Valley council asked the Welsh Office to fund a survey into the link between health and the former furnacite plant in Abercwmboi? That request was refused at that time. Is he further aware that, 10 years on, in a four-hour period, 50 women in Abercwmboi consulted a medical solicitor because of their concerns about breast cancer, and that the incidence of cancer in that small community is very high compared with the average? Will he at last do something about that and make funds available so that we can conduct a proper survey into the link between that past industrial process and the health of people who live in Cynon Valley?

Mr. Jones: That is clearly a matter for local representation in Cynon Valley and, of course, for Bro Taf health authority. I do not in any way underestimate the importance of the local health authority giving the most careful consideration to that factor, but the formula seeks to distribute the available moneys between all the health authorities on the best and fairest basis available, with particular regard to mortality. I anticipate that we will review that formula to ensure that it remains up to date and the fairest and most appropriate basis for distributing the moneys.

Pupil Exclusions

9. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children were excluded from schools in (a) 1990, (b) 1995 and (c) 1996; and if he will make a statement. [14449]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Returns provided by local education authorities in Wales show that the number of permanent exclusions from maintained schools for the academic years 1994-95 and 1995-96 were 476 and 543 respectively. Figures for 1990 are not available.

Mr. Rowlands: Are not those figures, by any standards, extremely worrying? Do they not require some new initiatives to be taken, such as cities in schools? Will those figures be helped in any way by rising class sizes? Many local authorities now face the prospect of making teachers redundant and of increasing class sizes. Those figures will become worse, not better, unless we deal with these fundamental problems.

Mr. Evans: First, the hon. Gentleman will know of the support that the Welsh Office has consistently given to the cities in schools initiative. Secondly, in relation to exclusions, he will be aware that there are currently

measures before the House to increase the period for which a fixed-term exclusion can operate. We have to put these matters in perspective. Although he is right to identify the increase, it cannot be said to represent a trend—we are dealing with about one in 1,000 pupils. However, I recognise the importance of ensuring that there is a range of ways of dealing with school discipline, and such matters are very much addressed by measures that are currently before the House.

Structural Funds

10. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the allocation of European Union structural funds in Wales during the current financial year. [14450]

Mr. Hague: During the current financial year, around £115 million has been committed to projects approved or conditionally approved under the European Union structural fund programmes that operate in Wales.

Mr. Jones: Does the Secretary of State agree that Wales, compared with, say, Ireland, fared badly in the negotiations for structural funds for the period 1994–99? Does he agree with my assessment that the Government's failure to provide a proper settlement for Wales has cost us about £1 billion in funds in that five-year period? Is that not the clearest example of Wales's lack of clout in Brussels? What we need is a Parliament with a real voice in Europe. Does the Secretary of State accept that, given such a clear example, the people of Wales will vote in increasing numbers for a party that is dedicated to ensuring that we have that proper Parliament? Nothing will stop us, not even the yapping noises from the Prime Minister's poodles on the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Hague: No direct comparisons can be made with Ireland, which is an objective 1 area. To obtain objective 1 status, an area must comply with the strict socio-economic criteria that are set by the European Union. If it is the aspiration of the hon. Gentleman's party to reduce Wales to meeting the criteria for objective 1 status, it is a pretty pitiful ambition.

ATTORNEY–GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

22. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Attorney–General what assessment he has made of the workings of the Crown Prosecution Service; and what were the number and proportion of successful prosecutions in each of the past two years for which figures are available. [14432]

The Attorney–General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): In both years, around 900,000, or 98 per cent., of defendants were convicted in magistrates courts, and around 80,000, or 90 per cent., in the Crown court. In relation to contested cases in the Crown court, 12,705, or 59.6 per cent., of defendants were convicted in 1995, and 12,185, or 59.8 per cent., of defendants were convicted in 1996.

Mr. Cunningham: Is the Attorney-General aware that victims of crime are extremely concerned about the way in which the Crown Prosecution Service either drops or alters charges without informing or consulting them? Would it not be far better if he adopted Labour's policy, which is to reform the CPS?

The Attorney–General: I think that the hon. Gentleman is misinformed. I look forward to receiving from him—I mean that—details of examples of dropped charges, of charges not proceeded with or of charges being altered by the CPS. As I have said in the House time and again, that complaint is frequently made but very seldom substantiated. I invite him to substantiate it, and then to consider whether that is the right problem on which to focus.

Sir Sydney Chapman: When the Crown Prosecution Service has brought successful prosecutions and my right hon. and learned Friend has felt that the sentences passed were unduly lenient, what success has he had when he has referred them to the Court of Appeal? Has it been the rule or the exception for the Court of Appeal to impose heavier sentences?

The Attorney–General: My hon. Friend makes an important point of relevance to victims. It is right that offenders should not only be brought to justice, but be properly punished in accordance with law. The power to refer what seems to me to be an unduly lenient sentence has given the Court of Appeal the opportunity to redress that, and to lay down guidelines for the future. In the years since the power has been in force, the court has increased approximately 87 per cent.—seven out of eight—of the sentences that the Attorney-General has referred to it.

Mr. John Morris: Is it because of the Home Secretary's aim or hope to achieve a higher number of convictions that we are told to expect proposals to deny the right to trial by jury to a large number of offences triable either way? Was the Attorney-General consulted, and is it his professional view that if that came to pass there would be a higher number of convictions?

The Attorney–General: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have noted that that was one of the recommendations made by the Runciman royal commission some years ago. It has not been implemented. The Government are considering proposals on the matter and will make their position clear in the near future.

23. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Attorney–General what steps he is taking to improve the efficiency of the Crown Prosecution Service through the use of information technology. [14433]

The Solicitor–General (Sir Derek Spencer): Current proposals are designed to increase the speed and efficiency of internal communications, make the case-tracking and management system easier to use and, through a private finance initiative contract, provide an infrastructure for links with other agencies in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Sweeney: I welcome my hon. and learned Friend's reply. Does he agree that information technology has enormous potential to improve communications between the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts, the police,

defence lawyers and the probation service, and that effective use of it may enable us to avoid many unnecessary adjournments and improve the efficiency of justice?

The Solicitor–General: My hon. Friend is right. I understand that he had the advantage of seeing a system in operation in South Glamorgan on a recent visit to his local CPS office. He will have seen the speed with which communication can take place when e-mail links are in operation. Apart from that example, where the police have provided the system, two other systems are being piloted at the moment: one in Suffolk and one in Southampton, which I have seen. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that there is co-ordination of computerisation under the criminal justice system initiative, in which the CPS, along with other agencies in the criminal justice system, is playing a full part. There is obviously great potential to speed up the flow of information throughout the whole of the criminal justice system.

Mrs. Dunwoody: But is the hon. and learned Gentleman aware that there is great urgency in this matter because sometimes simply bringing a case to court can take up to five years? That damages the justice system and is impossible for victims to understand. In addition, is he sure that any private initiative will be totally confidential and secure?

The Solicitor–General: I can give the hon. Lady that undertaking. She speaks of delays of up to five years; that is another example of the type of complaint to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General just referred—vague and unsubstantiated generalisations—*[Interruption.]* If she will give us chapter and verse, we will follow it up, but it does not help the CPS, the victims or anyone else to make vague generalised complaints of that nature in public.

Racial Harassment

24. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney–General if he will make a statement about recent prosecutions for racial harassment. [14434]

The Attorney–General: Since 1 January 1995, there have been 21 applications for consent to prosecute under part III of the Public Order Act 1986 for offences of incitement to racial hatred, of which 19 have been granted, one has been refused and one has been withdrawn.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the fact that Sheik Bakri and Mr. al-Masari can spew forth racist hatred with impunity demonstrates the need for the law to be strengthened so that they can be prosecuted rather than pampered by social security?

The Attorney–General: Without wishing to comment on an individual case, I should say to my hon. Friend that, if he knows of evidence of people seeking to stir up racial hatred or behaving in such a way that racial hatred is likely to be stirred up, that evidence should be given to the police. My hon. Friend will recognise from the figures that I have given that increasing evidence has been forthcoming in the past two years and that the number of prosecutions has increased significantly in recent years. I invite him or anyone else who might have such evidence to pass it to the police so that the matter can be properly considered by the prosecuting authorities.

Mr. Winnick: On racial harassment, is not it a matter of the gravest concern that the murderers of Stephen Lawrence have yet to be brought to justice? Perhaps the Attorney-General can understand the sheer agony felt by his parents that justice has been denied and mocked. If it is right for newspapers—as indeed it is—to campaign on behalf of those in prison whom they believe are innocent, why should not a newspaper, to its credit, campaign against those whom it believes are responsible for one of the most foul racially motivated murders in recent times? I congratulate the *Daily Mail*.

The Attorney–General: The whole House will once again wish to express its sympathy to the parents of Stephen Lawrence, who was attacked and murdered in an entirely unprovoked racist attack at a bus stop. The hon. Gentleman will know that it is not because of lack of effort that it has not been possible to bring that case to a conclusion. A prosecution was initiated by the Crown Prosecution Service in 1993, but it was discontinued because of lack of evidence. A private prosecution was brought in 1995, but the judge stopped it precisely because the identification evidence was entirely unreliable. However, should evidence in that case or in other cases be forthcoming, it will be examined. There is no lack of will to prosecute such cases.

Mr. Sumberg: I support the plea made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), particularly in relation to the al-Masari case, in which evidence has been presented to the prosecution authorities yet no action has been taken. Is not the concern that there is a lack of will in the CPS to take the action necessary to bring such people before the courts?

The Attorney–General: I assure my hon. Friend that there is absolutely no lack of will. If he—who is himself a lawyer—believes that there is evidence in that case and wishes to present it, it is open to him to draw it to the police's attention. All such cases are examined extremely carefully, and, as I have said, statistics demonstrate a substantial increase in the number of prosecutions in recent years.

Criminal Offences (Police Officers)

25. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Attorney–General what reports the Crown Prosecution Service has received relating to allegations of police officers being involved in protecting illegal Jamaican immigrants from deportation and prosecution for criminal offences. [14435]

The Solicitor–General: The Crown Prosecution Service has received no reports about criminal offences alleged to have been committed by police officers in the type of matters referred to by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ainger: Is the Solicitor-General aware of the case of Delroy Denton, a yardie who came into this country illegally, was known to the immigration service as an illegal immigrant and was then run as an informer by

Metropolitan police officers? Is he aware that Mr. Denton raped a 15-year-old girl while serving as an informant of the Metropolitan police, that he was released in very unusual circumstances and that he later raped and murdered another woman, leaving two children orphaned? Is he aware that no Metropolitan police officer or Home Office immigration official has been disciplined? Does he agree that that is outrageous, and that there should be a full inquiry into those matters?

The Solicitor–General: The place for such allegations to be investigated is in the courts. The cases of Denton and others, which were referred to in the article to which the hon. Gentleman refers, are still going through the courts. They are not yet completed, and they are sub judice. I should tell him that "information received"—as it is usually referred to—is a very powerful investigation and prosecution tool in the criminal courts. Without it, justice would not be served.

Crown Prosecution Service (Book Expenditure)

26. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Attorney–General how much the Crown Prosecution Service has spent on legal text books and what main publications have been purchased in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement. [14436]

The Solicitor–General: In the past three full years, such expenditure totalled £985,355, £814,467 and £705,830 respectively. The main publications purchased were "Archbold Criminal Pleading, Evidence and Practice", "Stone's Justices' Manual" and "Wilkinson's Road Traffic Offences"—three textbooks that will be very well known to the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris).

Mr. Greenway: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for his answer. Would those textbooks have been available to the *Daily Mail* in its treatment of the alleged murderers of Stephen Lawrence? What advice would he find in those books if he were to respond—if he is yet able to say what he will do—to the invitation to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to comment on the *Daily Mail*'s action? Does he think that a civil case could succeed in the light of what the *Daily Mail* has done?

The Solicitor–General: When it comes to legal advice, I am sure that the *Daily Mail* need spare no expense, unlike the Crown Prosecution Service, which must have regard to proper expenditure. On my hon. Friend's specific question, it would appear that no proceedings can be brought under the Contempt of Court Act 1981 because no proceedings currently exist. My right hon. and learned Friend has already announced that he is giving common law contempt careful consideration and hopes to announce his decision as soon as practicable.

POINT OF ORDER

3.30 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Should not the Secretary of State for Health be here to make a statement about adoption? He has been on the radio announcing his plans to change the rules. Should he not tell us directly and allow us to question him, not least on why he is axing the overseas adoption helpline?

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed that the Secretary of State for Health or any Minister intends to make a statement today.

Orders of the Day

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

BSE Crisis

Madam Speaker: We have before us an Opposition day on the BSE crisis. Because of the number of hon. Members seeking to catch my eye during this debate, speeches between the hours of 7 pm and 9 pm will have to be limited to 10 minutes.

3.31 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move,

That this House believes that, in view of the Government's incompetent handling of the BSE and beef crises and its failure to make the promised progress towards lifting the ban on the export of beef and beef products, the salary of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should be reduced by £1,000.

The purpose of the debate is to call the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to account for his disastrous handling of the beef crisis, a crisis which he and his colleagues have exacerbated by blunder after blunder. Has any Minister presided over an episode of such misjudgment, incompetence and disarray? Farmers' livelihoods have been damaged, thousands of jobs in the industry have been lost, consumer confidence has been jeopardised and the credibility of the United Kingdom in Europe and beyond has been undermined.

The bill to the taxpayer has been more than £3 billion—that is more than £130 for every taxpayer in the land. The last Government gave us the poll tax; this Government have given us the beef tax.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): The hon. Gentleman knows from previous debates on this issue that I have taken an independent line on this matter. Will he tell farmers in my constituency which part of the £3.3 billion support for the beef industry the Labour party would not have paid?

Dr. Strang: Indeed, I shall come to that point—*[Interruption.]* In a word, it is the hugely excessive fees paid to the slaughterhouses for slaughtering animals—two or three times what the slaughterhouses should have received. I shall come to that point later.

For the beef industry, the crisis began on 20 March. On that day, which is riveted in the minds of everyone in the beef industry, the Secretary of State for Health and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food came to the House of Commons and advised us that the Government's committee, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, had advised the Government that the most likely explanation of the new variant of CJD was BSE.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: No.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House fully appreciated the gravity of that statement. Yet on that day the Minister said:

"I do not believe that this information should damage consumer confidence and thus the beef market."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 387.]

The beef industry, the farming industry and our rural communities are still paying a heavy price for that misjudgment.

The announcement was bungled. Hon. Members will understand that since 1986, when BSE was identified, there has always been a possibility of a link between BSE in cattle and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. The Government's Southwood report made that clear in 1989. The Tyrrell committee—another committee set up by the Government—advised random testing of the brains of cattle going through our slaughterhouses. The House will know that that recommendation was never implemented.

There was always a possibility that such information could come to the Government, but the statement was bungled. On Wednesday 20 March, we were told about the possibility of the link, but we were also told that we would have to wait over the weekend and that it would be Monday at the earliest before the Secretary of State for Health would come back and tell us whether children or other special groups were particularly at risk. What an impact that had on consumer confidence! What an impact that had on our industry! What an impact that had on markets in Europe! No wonder some countries took unilateral action to halt the movement of our beef and beef supplies—there had been such a collapse in confidence in this country during those few days.

There was no contingency plan and clearly no strategy. Consider, for example, the position of cattle aged over 30 months. Those cattle are important because they are more likely to carry the BSE agent. On 20 March, the Minister told us that all cattle over 30 months would be deboned and that special slaughterhouses would be designated and licensed for that purpose. Eight days later, on 28 March, he told the House of Commons that all beef from cattle over 30 months would be banned. They had not been able to organise the licensing of the slaughterhouses to carry out the deboning. On 3 April he told the House of Commons that the Government had decided that all cattle over 30 months should be slaughtered, destroyed and incinerated. That is a measure of how unprepared the Government were. They had no strategy or contingency plan, but BSE had been in our cattle since 1986 and they knew full well that there was always the possibility of a link between BSE in cattle and CJD in humans.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman has given an account of events around 20 March last year. Does he still agree with the point that he made on 22 March last year that European Governments were acting prudently in banning British beef?

Dr. Strang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for coming up with that, because if ever a position was deliberately misrepresented repeatedly, that is it.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): "It says here".

Dr. Strang: Yes, it does. [*Laughter.*] Conservative Members can laugh as much as they like. On 20 March, the Government made their announcement. On 22 March, a number of Governments, including the French Government, announced a unilateral cessation of imports of beef products from the United Kingdom until the position was clarified. Given the total collapse in the market in this country and given the confusion, the right hon. and learned Gentleman's response was counterproductive. He launched an intemperate attack on the French. He even said—I remember this well—that the French action was probably illegal. Knowing that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was a distinguished lawyer, I thought that he would be right, but he was wrong. The French action was totally legal.

After that date—this is a different development—the European Union imposed its collective ban on the export of British beef and beef products. That was a worldwide ban. I have made it clear and have always done so—indeed, the whole Opposition have agreed with the Government—that that ban is not justified. The reason why it is not justified is that—

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: No, I am going to explain this point.

Mr. Arnold *rose*—

Dr. Strang: The hon. Gentleman has in his hand a press release that I put out on the Friday after the Wednesday. I am talking about the overall European Union ban which was imposed on 27 March. That is the ban that matters. The important point is that, when that ban was imposed, the Opposition took the view that provided that all the controls were in place—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Gentlemen should not persist when it is obvious that the Opposition spokesman at the Dispatch Box is not giving way. They should resume their seats.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. That means all of you.

Dr. Strang: The important point is that, provided that all the controls are in place, the cattle over 30 months old have been slaughtered, and in particular, that the controls in the slaughterhouses have been implemented fully, and not in the way they were in 1995 and years before, we take the view that the ban is not justified, never has been justified and should be lifted.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) giving way? *[Interruption.]* I need no instructions from the Opposition Front Bench. I am waiting for Mr. Strang to indicate to me whether he will give way.

Dr. Strang: I am not giving way.

Madam Speaker: That being so, hon. Members will resume their seats.

Dr. Strang: I am taking a bit of time to nail a particular misrepresentation. Most hon. Members who follow the

[Dr. Strang]

issue know that it is quite wrong. The position is quite clear. Our position is that, if all the controls are being implemented, our beef and beef products are as safe as if not safer than those in any other country in the European Union. That is why the whole beef ban is unjustified and should be lifted. That surely cannot be clearer.

I turn from the origin of the over-30-months scheme. The House should remember that, on 29 April—

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. Mr. Arnold, it has been indicated to you by the hon. Gentleman at the Dispatch Box and by me as Speaker that he does not wish to give way. I should be glad if, for the time being, you would resume your seat. The hon. Gentleman may give way later, but obviously not quite at this time.

Dr. Strang: I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker. If the Government Members will make a responsible attempt to listen to the debate, I shall certainly give way later.

I have described the origin of the over-30-months slaughter scheme. The scheme was supposed to start on 29 April. In fact, by the end of May, hardly any cattle had been slaughtered. There was so much chaos and confusion and anger on the part of farmers that there was wide speculation that the Minister of Agriculture would be sacked. Was he sacked? No, the Prime Minister chose not to sack the Minister but humiliate him instead. The Prime Minister appointed the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), as the man in charge of BSE and the over-30-months slaughter scheme. He was to be the new beef supremo to take over from the Minister—or to work with him. We did not know because there was total confusion. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was meeting farmers; the Minister was meeting farmers.

The Minister told us on 24 July that the backlog of cattle to be slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme would be cleared by October. What did the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster bring to the situation? On 12 September, the Chancellor coolly announced that the Government had no idea how many cattle were in the backlog. There we were, into a huge slaughter scheme—more than 1 million cattle have been slaughtered under it—yet in September, months after the scheme had begun operating, the Chancellor of the Duchy announced that the Government had no idea in the first place how many cattle they would slaughter under the over-30-months scheme. No wonder there was such confusion and anger. In October, 400,000 cattle were in the backlog waiting to be slaughtered. No wonder farmers were angry.

Some farmers were lucky and had their cattle slaughtered early, but others did not manage to get the slaughterhouse to take their cattle. They had held the cattle all those months—it was autumn and winter was approaching—and they did not want to spend more money on winter feed. What did the Minister do? He cut the compensation payable for each animal to the farmer. Those farmers who had held their animals longest had their compensation reduced below what was paid to the lucky few who got their cattle slaughtered early.

At that time, the National Farmers Union passed a motion of no confidence in the Minister. That was an historic occasion—the National Farmers Union passing a vote of no confidence in a Conservative Minister of Agriculture. Surely that was an indication that something was going wrong in the farming community.

The Government were also massively overpaying the slaughterhouses, which were getting £87.50 plus the value of a hide per animal slaughtered. That is a scandal, because it is two or three times what they should have been paid. The Minister has subsequently cut that figure, but it was a disgrace—given all the groups that suffered, including the transport workers, the head deboners and the people working in the packaging plants, who did not get a penny—that such excessive sums should have been given to the huge abattoirs.

While we had that catalogue of chaos in the over-30-months scheme at home, Ministers were totally failing to put over Britain's case in Europe. The House will recall the slaughter auction that took place. The Minister came back from Brussels to tell the House that he had agreed a second slaughter programme; in addition to the OTMS, there would be a selective slaughter of milking cows—those deemed most likely to come down with BSE in the future. In April, the Minister said that we would slaughter 42,000 cattle. By May, 80,000 cattle were to be slaughtered, but by the end of that month the figure was back down to 42,000. In June, the figure finally agreed by the Prime Minister at the Florence summit was around 128,000 cattle.

The Florence summit was important. The Prime Minister came back and informed the House that he had reached an agreement for a certified herd scheme. In October, he said, we could start exporting beef from the certified herds and, in November, all the beef that could be sold in this country—from cattle under 30 months—would be available for export to Europe and beyond. In effect, he said, the beef ban would be lifted in its entirety by November.

What happened? It became clear in July that the Government would not meet their undertaking to put the arrangements in place by 1 August. We had a debate just before the House rose in July, and the Minister said:

"the agreement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister secured at the Florence Council provides the framework for the step-by-step lifting of the European Union ban on exports of United Kingdom beef and beef products. Decisions on each step will be taken on the basis of scientific and objective criteria. The agreement was a great success, and provides a solid way forward."—[*Official Report*, 24 July 1996; Vol. 282, c. 369.]

Those were the Minister's words in July.

In September, the Government announced the suspension of the selective slaughter programme. They were not going ahead with their side of the Florence agreement. The selective slaughter scheme was the crucial element of that agreement.

Mr. David Shaw *rose—*

Dr. Strang: After all the chaos, when the House came back in October, the Minister did not come to the House—

Mr. Shaw *rose—*

Dr. Strang: Sit down. The Minister did not come to the House on the first day back to explain what had happened. I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker,

for allowing me to summon the Minister on a private notice question to force him to come to the House. What did he do? He set out all the reasons why the Government were not going to implement the selective slaughter programme. He explained why we were—if not reneging on—certainly suspending our implementation of the Florence agreement. That was on 14 October. On 28 October, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said on Radio 4's "Today" programme:

"We accept the Florence agreement and we intend to comply with it. We intend to implement a selective cull programme once we are in a position to do and to do it under a Union banner."

There was utter confusion. The industry did not know whether the Government would implement our side of the Florence agreement and whether we were to have a selective slaughter programme. This carried on until December, when the Government announced their U-turn. We welcomed that U-turn, as we had been urging the Government to implement a selective slaughter programme from the time the House returned in October. The Minister announced that the Government were to implement the programme.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): May I ask the hon. Gentleman one simple question? If we had gone ahead with the extended or selective cull in October, what would have been the reaction of farmers who had cattle waiting under the 30-months scheme? Surely it is logical to get rid of one problem before one starts dealing with the next one.

Dr. Strang: That is a good try, and the Minister has used that argument. However, it will not wash, and I will explain why. Even if one accepts that it was not possible to start the selective slaughter programme, and I do not—after all, all we had to do was to start it in some UK slaughterhouses—we should have identified the cattle to be slaughtered under the programme. Then, if we had decided to go ahead, all the cattle would have been identified and the farmers would have been visited by the state veterinary service. There was no justification for the Government's prevarication throughout the summer, or for their U-turn on the issue. As for maternal transmission and the Roy Anderson paper from Oxford, the whole point of that information was that—if anything—it would have enabled us to have a more effective selective slaughter programme. That is no excuse, either.

What is the present position? It is exactly as was set out by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition last week. First, the Government promised last June that the beef ban would be lifted in November. Last week, not a single piece of the ban had been lifted. Secondly, the position last week was that not a single animal—not one cow—had been slaughtered under the selective slaughter programme, which was part of the deal under the Florence agreement. As for the certified herds scheme—herds from which exports can start—the position last week was that that scheme had not been put to Brussels. The cost of the BSE fiasco is now estimated at £3.3 billion. It is currently costing £4 million a day—£130 for every taxpayer in the country.

What is the way forward? First, we must accept that the Florence agreement is the only mechanism on the table to secure the lifting of the beef ban, and we must implement our side of it. That means pressing ahead with the selective slaughter programme and securing agreement with Brussels. I hope that the Minister will have something positive to say on the certified herd scheme. I want to be constructive about this, because obviously we do not just want a scheme to be submitted. We want a scheme that the Minister has discussed with the Commission and which has a chance of being agreed quickly to enable exports to start from the certified herds.

As the House understands, that is particularly important to Northern Ireland. I make no apology for speaking of Northern Ireland in particular, because it is there that the greatest damage has been done. I see the Minister smiling, but there is a serious point here; it is not a matter of votes and politicking.

Mr. David Shaw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: No.

The agriculture and livestock industry is proportionally more important in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom; within that agriculture industry beef is especially important; and within that beef sector, half the beef is exported. That is why so many workers have been laid off in Northern Ireland, why the industry is so angry and why it is so important for us to move ahead, with agreement, with a certified herds scheme that will enable Northern Ireland to lead us out of the crisis.

What is not acceptable—I trust that the Minister will agree with this—is an agreement that enables Northern Ireland to move ahead but that includes conditions that would prevent Scotland, Wales or England from doing so. We do not mind Northern Ireland being the first ship in the convoy, provided that we are in that convoy, but it would be totally unacceptable for it to move ahead on the basis of an agreement that locked Scottish, Welsh and English beef out of the world market for a long time.

We want progress on the certified herds scheme and the incineration of all the carcases. My right hon. Friend the deputy leader of the Labour party discovered vessels in Hull packed to the gunwales with carcases. We know why those vessels are there. Only 4 per cent. of the carcases have been rendered and incinerated. We have to press ahead and complete the destruction and incineration of the cattle, so that we can put the issue behind us.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Will the hon. Gentleman clarify what he said about Northern Ireland? He was talking about circumstances in which Northern Ireland could lead the way. I fully agree that it would be possible for that to happen soon, because once the cull agreed at Florence is commenced, as it soon will be in Northern Ireland, the traceability and the presence of the grass-fed herds and the farm quality assurance scheme will make it possible for an application to be made to the Commission for the beginning of a progressive lifting of the ban, beginning with Northern Ireland and then extending elsewhere. Would the hon. Gentleman support such a move?

Dr. Strang: Yes, indeed. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, because he made an important point that I did not make. The strength of the Northern Ireland case lies not only in the fact that the beef industry is so important there; the strongest argument is that the traceability scheme is in place, with all the information on computer, so all the cattle can be identified.

[Dr. Strang]

I went to Northern Ireland many months ago and met the farmers there; I did not realise until I went that all their animals are flagged, so they know exactly where they stand. I do not want to make a meal of this, but in 1990 the Labour party, the official Opposition, urged the Government to implement just such a scheme throughout the United Kingdom. It is all there on the record in *Hansard*. How much stronger our position would have been had we had that computerised system up and running today.

Only last month, the Minister did another U-turn. After years of insisting that the present arrangements with regard to food safety were adequate and should not be changed, he announced the appointment of a full-time independent food safety adviser and the setting up of a part-time food council, if the Conservatives were to win the general election. He stressed then that the consumer no longer trusted Ministers when they said that our food was safe.

The Minister has lost the confidence of the beef industry. By compounding the crisis, he has caused thousands of additional jobs to be lost. He has lost the confidence of the farmers, and that is why they passed a vote of no confidence in him. He has lost the confidence of our consumers, as he has freely admitted. His beef fiasco is costing the country more than £3.3 billion: more than £130 for every taxpayer. Surely he has lost the confidence of the House. I urge hon. Members to vote for our motion.

3.59 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The proper response to the motion, and indeed to the way in which it has been moved, is contempt. In promoting this debate, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) admitted on the "Today" programme this morning, the Opposition are not primarily concerned with BSE, beef, British agriculture or even with my salary. Their principal concern is to try to trigger an early general election, because they recognise that the growing strengths of the British economy and the increasing disagreement in their ranks make a Conservative victory in a May general election extremely probable. This is a political stunt, but one of which the Labour party should be profoundly ashamed. The inevitable consequence of a debate such as this is that confidence in British beef will be damaged. The already difficult task of getting the ban lifted will be made yet harder.

I read that Labour's deputy leader, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), has been put on the case. That is something of a novelty. His only knowledge of the work of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is a passing connection with the drink trade. However, I can well understand how embarrassed the Opposition are in having to field the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East as their chief spokesman. It is extraordinary that a party dedicated to devolution for Scotland should think it right that the interests of English, Welsh and Northern Irish farmers should be represented by an urban-based Edinburgh Scot.

Moreover, it is truly bizarre that the hon. Gentleman, who criticises me for having failed to secure the lifting of the ban, is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) pointed out, the Labour spokesman whose first reaction to the imposition of the ban was to defend it. He described it as prudent. This afternoon, he tried to wriggle out of what he said but I shall remind the House of his comments. On Friday 22 March, he issued a press release that stated:

"Instead of talking about the French Government acting illegally by halting imports of beef and cattle from the United Kingdom, Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg should understand they were acting prudently . . . There are many more cases of BSE in the United Kingdom than in France or Germany. A temporary cessation in the movement of British cattle, beef and beef products into the continent may be wise at this time."

As if that was not enough, the hon. Gentleman repeated it on GMTV two days later, when he said:

"Understandably, France immediately halted the movement of all beef and beef products into France. Indeed, if it were the other way around, I would like to think that a British Government would have done the same."

What I say to the House is this: should the hon. Gentleman ever try to persuade the Europeans to lift the ban, they will treat his overtures with incredulity and contempt.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North–East): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hogg: I shall give way in a moment.

The plain truth is that Labour's record is a disgraceful one. In every debate on BSE—including statements and private notice questions we have had 25 such debates since March—Labour Members, beginning with the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), have echoed or often simply parroted the most alarmist headlines in the tabloid press. Labour Members have done serious damage to consumer confidence, and, because what they say is played back in Europe, they have made our task much more difficult. Indeed, because of this debate, I cannot today attend the Agriculture Council when beef is being discussed. United Kingdom farmers will not understand Labour undermining their interests in Europe.

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not know whether the Minister is being deliberately gratuitously offensive to the House—he appears to have been doing so throughout his speech—but, instead of going on in that manner and making the case for our motion, will he get on to defending the Government's record on this catastrophe that has done so much damage to British beef?

Mr. Hogg: Indeed, I shall get on to defending the Government's record, but before I do it is highly desirable to say something about the Labour party.

In putting down this motion, the Labour party has shown scant regard for the other parties in the House. I have read that there is a close relationship between the Labour leader and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), but when push came to shove there was no prior consultation about the motion, just the arrogant certainty that the Liberal Democrats—that refuge for the flotsam and jetsam of political life—will meekly follow Labour into the Lobby. No doubt that contemptuous assumption is well founded, but Liberal Democrats need to understand how much they are taken for granted and how little they are regarded by those by whom they sit.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with the National

Farmers Union representative from Somerset, who told me a couple of days ago, "We need a debate like this like a hole in the head: just as we are getting confidence back into the British beef industry, the Labour party goes and shoots us through the heart"?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that has happened in every one of the 25 debates or statements that we have had on this subject since March last year. My hon. Friend makes another point—despite the fact that Labour has trivialised the issue and damaged British interests, the subject matter of this debate is of great importance. What I propose to do is to describe in detail where we now stand, and then to respond to some of the criticisms that have been made, both of British policy and of myself personally.

British beef and beef products are the safest in Europe. They can be eaten with total confidence. Our safeguards are stringent and our precautions are comprehensive; we lead where others should follow. Subject to the tightly defined terms of the beef assurance scheme, British beef or beef products sold for human consumption must come from cattle under 30 months of age. We have the tightest feed regulations of any—no rations containing meat or bonemeal can be fed to any other farm animal. Moreover, our controls both in and on the slaughterhouses and the renderers are widely acknowledged to be the most effective in Europe.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will my right hon. and learned Friend reassure the people of Kent about the current proposal for a new disposal scheme involving effluent from an animal rendering plant that will feed into my constituency? Can he reassure those people that the new evidence presented by such people as Professor Almond, and currently being considered by an inquiry into the proposal, will be taken very seriously at the highest scientific and political levels in the Government?

Mr. Hogg: I can indeed give my hon. Friend such a reassurance. Indeed, I can do more: I can tell him that I will ask Professor Pattison and SEAC to consider again—because they have already considered it—whether that kind of disposal mechanism is safe.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): We hope that British beef is safe, and is recognised as such. It has cost the country a great deal of money to establish that.

The Minister seemed to decry the debate, but does he not consider it worth while, given the historical factor? His right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke of a thousand years of history. Does the Minister not realise that, in more than a thousand years, the British people have developed an innate genius for producing and dealing in livestock and domestic animals, and that the Government's incompetence and inadequacy has brought that historic record into sheer derision? Does that not justify a debate today?

Mr. Hogg: It would if that were true, but it is not. If he thinks back to the dark days of last March and contrasts what we thought then with what we see now, the hon. Gentleman will realise how much progress we have made. Consumer confidence here in the United Kingdom is much stronger than consumer confidence in most other countries in the European Union. Moreover, the prosperity of most beef producers here in Britain is much greater than in most other European Union countries.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) *rose—*

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) *rose—*

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I want to make some progress, but I will give way again later.

In implementing the measures that I have described, introducing the selective cull and establishing an effective cattle movement and identification scheme, we have complied with all the conditions set out in the Florence agreement. We have done what we said that we would do, and we are now entitled to look to other member states to deliver their side of the bargain. Soon, they will have an opportunity to do so.

The House knows of our proposals for certified herds. They have been prepared, published and available for comment for some time, and we have been working closely with the European Commission on the detailed papers. I myself met Commissioner Fischler at the end of last month. The Government will formally submit those proposals to the Commission at the moment when we are, in my judgment, likely to receive the most favourable response. That will probably be within the next two weeks.

Our proposals for certified herds are general in character, but, because of the low incidence of BSE in Ulster and because of the unique and reliable data base that is available there, they are likely to be of particular benefit to the farmers of Northern Ireland. That is especially true now that the rate at which BSE is occurring in Northern Ireland is lower than the rate in the Republic. I think that that constitutes a response to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble). The applications will be general in character, but we will not stand in the way of progress in any part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I thank the Minister most sincerely for giving way on this very important point, fundamental to the future of the beef industry in Northern Ireland, which is a base industry. Is he saying to the House that, in respect of Northern Ireland, which has already completed the four conditions of the Florence convention and within three weeks will be able to complete the fifth requirement, in those circumstances he will proactively ask the Commission and the European Community to allow Northern Irish beef access to Europe in advance of any region that has not fulfilled those requirements?

Mr. Hogg: The concept of certified herds is general in its application, but in the drafting of the provisions, we had very much in mind the special circumstances that exist in Northern Ireland; because, by the nature of the identification systems, and because of the very low incidence of BSE and because the Republic of Ireland is now experiencing a higher rate of BSE than is the Province, the concept will be especially beneficial to Northern Ireland, and we had that in mind when we prepared those papers. I have no doubt that, in the course

[Mr. Hogg]

of our negotiations with the Commission, points such as those that I have just outlined to the House will be made to me by the Commissioner, and I will agree with them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: Now I shall make some progress.

Mr. Sheerman *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hogg: I want to say something about the state—

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ross: I have listened with great interest to what the Minister has said, but will he tell the House and the farmers in Northern Ireland that he will actually ask that the ban on Northern Irish beef be lifted? That is the key.

Mr. Hogg: That flows from what I have said. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh no."] Oh yes, it does. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh no, it doesn't."] Oh yes, it does. Our application is general, but it works with particular effect in Northern Ireland, for all the reasons that I have mentioned. I certainly intend to support the case of Northern Ireland—apart from anything else, I come from a family that knows and lived in Northern Ireland for many a generation. I feel strongly about the Province of Northern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I am sure that the House and the right hon. and learned Gentleman know that this week there will be complete chaos and turmoil in Europe—that there is a censure motion to sack the entire Commission on the issue that we are discussing today. I am sure that, keeping that in mind, he wants to do something that would be of real practical value to the farmers of Northern Ireland.

Will the Minister say today clearly to the farmers of Northern Ireland that, as they are ahead in the matter of meat and its standards, and as the Commissioner, and the President of the Council, said that an application for Northern Ireland was needed first, he will make that application—not to do down any other part of this kingdom, but to start the ball rolling, and to take up what the Commissioner has asked for?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right. He will not find a more formidable supporter of the case of Northern Ireland than himself and the right hon. Member for Upper Bann. Of course the case for Northern Ireland is powerful; that is precisely why I drafted the certified herds scheme in the way that I did. It is general in its application—it applies throughout the United Kingdom—but the case for Northern Ireland is very powerful and the Commissioner knows that and will find that I urge it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: I have given way about 12 times. Now I shall make progress. I want to say a word about the situation in Britain as regards the consumption of beef, and about our support for the producer and those in allied businesses.

Consumption of prime beef in Britain has fallen less than in many other European countries. Overall consumption is about 15 per cent. below trend, but consumption of prime cuts is very close to pre-crisis levels. That firmness in the market is in part an effect of the over-30-months scheme and the public's confidence in the measures that have been introduced to ensure the quality and safety of British beef.

We have invested huge sums to support the beef industry and some essential and related industries. The overall commitment, domestic and European, is around £3.5 billion thus far. In doing so, we have made an investment in public health—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister has said that he is not giving way for the moment. I ask Members to give him three or four minutes to make some progress, and then they may question him.

Mr. Hogg: I was dealing with the overall financial commitment we have made, domestic and European. It is around £3.5 billion thus far. We have made an investment in public health, in agriculture, in the countryside and in our future. It is the clearest possible evidence of the Tory party's commitment to rural Britain.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister is dwelling on the cost. That £3.5 billion could have built so many hospitals and paid so many nurses. We could have done so much with that £3.5 billion. He seems to be saying that it was a good investment. Has he seen the House of Commons Library figures? The cost is not just £3.5 billion to this country. A 10 per cent. reduction in demand since last March has meant £10 billion for the rest of Europe. What insanity has he visited on our country and the rest of Europe since last March?

Mr. Hogg: The implication in that remark is that the hon. Gentleman would not have supported the beef industry, would not have wanted his party to underpin the market in this country, and would have let the farmers go to the wall. That is the implication in his remarks, and I reject them.

Mrs. Anne Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: No, I am going to make some progress. I want to address some of the criticisms that have been made of my conduct over the past 12 months.

Some say that I should not have come to Parliament with the information that I had received from SEAC. Some say that I should first have gone to the European Council, to the European Parliament or to the Commission. Those things are frequently said by people who also say that I should have given evidence to the Committee of the European Parliament.

Such criticisms undermine the principle that British Ministers are accountable to, and only to, this Parliament and through it the British people. Once I had received the advice from SEAC that BSE was the most likely cause of

the new strain of CJD, my clear and absolute duty was to communicate that information to the House and to the public. That was my duty, and that I did.

The suggestion that I should have gone to Europe before giving the facts to the House is preposterous. It is a denial of every constitutional principle that I have always sought to uphold. Had I done so, I would have been rightly condemned the length and breadth of the country.

For the same kind of reason, I decided that it would be wrong to appear before the committee of inquiry established by the European Parliament. British Ministers are held to account here in Westminster in debates such as this, in statements on the Floor of the House and in Select Committees. All of this I have done—and many times too.

I do not accept that British Ministers can be summoned by Members of the European Parliament to testify as to matters that are the preserve of this House. There should be co-operation most certainly, the supply of information most certainly, and testimony by officials by all means. We did all that. Indeed, when the Committee came to London, I invited its members to lunch—which I thought might be more agreeable—but they declined. Once one concedes that Members of the European Parliament can summon a British Minister, one is derogating from the sovereignty of this place.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will acknowledge the importance of sound scientific research. Will he confirm that the Government almost eliminated research into BSE and scrapie in the late 1980s? Will he further confirm that the foresight panel reports, which define the Government's priorities for the future, make absolutely no mention of scrapie, BSE, prions or spongiform encephalopathy? Does the Minister believe that that represents setting the right priorities for the future? Do the Government appreciate the enormity of what they have done?

Mr. Hogg: As the hon. Lady was reading in her intervention, I think that she might have done somewhat better than that. In the current year, we are increasing very substantially the research moneys being expended on BSE. One of the first things that I did upon the appointment of Professor Pattison was to discuss with him whether he could identify any shortcomings in our research programmes. He was not able to do so at that time, and we shall seek to address any shortcomings he may identify subsequently.

Mr. David Shaw *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) seeks to intervene.

Mr. Shaw: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) refused to do so. Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that the press release that the hon. Gentleman issued on 22 March 1996 has been properly accounted for? It is interesting to note that the Labour party director who issued the press release has since resigned from her job—perhaps because she was so embarrassed about that Labour press release, which did so much damage to the British beef industry and set in train our problems with Europe. Is it not a fact that Labour is to blame for much of the £3 billion spent on the problem?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes a very substantial point. There is no doubt that the advice given by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) led directly to the withdrawal of beef from many schools throughout the country: a profoundly damaging consequence. I shall now make some progress.

I turn now to money. So far, a total of about £3.5 billion has been committed. Some of the expenditure is met by Europe—and we are grateful—but the bulk of the expenditure will ultimately fall on the United Kingdom taxpayer. In this area, I face two criticisms, which are mutually contradictory. For example, the Leader of the Opposition has said—most recently on Thursday—that the Government are spending too much on BSE-related expenditure. We heard echoes of that position this afternoon. However, many of his hon. Friends say that we are not spending enough. To those who say that we spend too much, I reply, "What would you like us to cut away?"

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): You.

Mr. Hogg: I am not very expensive.

Would the Opposition lessen the support for the beef producer? Would they reduce payments to the hill farmer? Would they reduce public protection by dismantling the over-30-months scheme? Would they reduce research, to which the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) referred earlier? Would they reduce the controls within the abattoirs? The answer in every case is no.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: No; I shall make some progress.

To those who argue for more; to those who seek compensation for all of those who have suffered loss—the headboners, the carriers, the exporters, the retailers, the manufacturers, the corner shops—I say this: "Your expectations are unreal. They are beyond the capacity of Government to meet; and no provision for any of these items has been made in Labour's spending plans. It would be dishonest to pretend otherwise."

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Last year, the Minister of Agriculture said—my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) referred to this in his speech—that there would be a step-by-step approach to the lifting of the ban. Can he say how many steps there are to take, and how many steps have been taken under his stewardship?

Mr. Hogg: I shall deal shortly with the lifting of the ban, but before I do, I want to say a word about the operation of the over-30-months scheme, under which more than 1,250,000 beasts have been slaughtered.

Yes, there were teething problems—

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough) *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: No; I shall make some progress.

[Mr. Hogg]

Some would describe them as problems of dentition. That is hardly surprising; nobody, anywhere, has ever conducted such a huge operation. However, those problems were overcome. We cleared the backlog by Christmas, as we said we would. To do that, we had to process more than a third of the total annual beef consumption, but we did it and the scheme is now working smoothly.

I now deal with the ban itself and the selective cull. The ban is wholly unjustified. It is wrong in principle and wrong in law. It should never have been imposed. Its removal, however, is not within our gift. What my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister secured at Florence was a framework that can and should lead to the lifting of the ban. Other member states may find it difficult to honour their part of the bargain; their beef markets have indeed collapsed, and they face pressures from their own farmers and consumers, but we have performed our part of the agreement. We are entitled to look to other member states to perform theirs.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hogg: No; I shall make some more progress.

The selective cull is, of course, a key element in all this. Leaving aside the question of maternal transmission, which, on any view, is a small part of the whole, there is no scientific or objective justification for the selective cull. It is a process that I find deeply distasteful, not least because it constitutes a serious interference with the property of others. However, unless we do it, the prospects for any lifting of the ban are negligible.

Last September, we deferred the implementation of the selective cull. For that I make no apology. As a result of work done by Professor Anderson and others, it is clear that BSE will virtually die out of the national herd by around 2001 or 2002. It is also clear that there is no acceptable selective cull—certainly not the one agreed with member states—that will decisively reduce the incidence of BSE or materially advance the date when the disease will die out.

Against such a background, it was clearly right that there should be a pause so that other member states could consider the justification for a selective cull. There was a further reason: implementation of the selective cull depended and depends both on parliamentary consent and on the co-operation of farmers.

For all the summer and much of the autumn, the National Farmers Union was strongly opposed to the cull. It argued, correctly, that it was without scientific justification. For that view it received much support in the House. It was not until late last year that the majority opinion within the farming community swung behind the selective cull, concluding, as we have, that, however distasteful it may be, without a selective cull there is no chance of getting the ban lifted.

The order was approved by the House at the end of January, and it passed through the other place on 3 February. We have started the process of tracing, and very soon the first cattle will be slaughtered.

Nobody knows better than I what a tragedy BSE has been. It has been a calamity for the individual beef producer. It is the greatest crisis that British agriculture has ever faced.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hogg: I shall not give way.

As a result of the action taken, we are now in a much better state than anybody in those dark days of last March would have thought possible. BSE is in fast decline: the number of confirmed cases in the United Kingdom is falling by 40 per cent. each year. By 2001 or thereabouts, BSE will be out of the national herd. It is right to say that British beef is the safest and best in Europe.

Consumer confidence is recovering, and farm incomes have been supported. The essential links in the chain have been preserved. Those achievements are the product of a collective effort by farmers, by their representatives, by retailers, by scientists, by manufacturers and by the Government too. Together we have created the circumstances in which the British beef industry can face the future with confidence.

The motion is a cheap political stunt, and I invite the House to reject it.

4.36 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): We have listened to the Minister rampaging, but we have not received any answers. The reason is that he does not have answers to give us. He has lost the confidence of the House, and has failed to obtain any agreement from Europe. I am not surprised about that. We all recall that, in June 1996, following the Florence meeting, the Prime Minister said in the House that the ban would be lifted by November. We are still waiting for the ban to be lifted. That is of no surprise to any of us, given the Minister's performance this afternoon.

I am not particularly surprised, given an incident that occurred in my constituency. We learned from leaked information that BSE-affected offal had been dumped in the constituency. That was denied by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, when I approached it. It was later found that more than 15 tonnes had been dumped, because a company in Stalybridge and Hyde had decided that it could not keep the contaminated offal over Christmas. Other than that, no reason has been given. No attempt has been made to examine the long-term effects of the dumping on safety and on the soil.

I brought this matter up with the Minister. After numerous letters to him, I issued a press statement about the incident. It was denied by MAFF in a statement that was issued by the MAFF office in Stafford, whereas the company that had dumped the offal had obtained permission from the MAFF office in Preston, which knew that the company was facing prosecution. If neither of the two offices knew what the other was doing, it is hardly surprising that we have not had the ban lifted in Europe.

It is no good the Minister doing as he has done today and blaming everyone else. He has blamed Europe, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats; indeed, he has blamed everyone, except himself and the Government, for the mess that he has got us into. I am afraid that what he said today will do nothing to resolve the crisis that he has created or to find a solution.

The Minister has lost the confidence of the farming community. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said, it must be unknown for the National Farmers Union council to pass a vote of no confidence in a Conservative Minister of Agriculture. The Minister is not contrite and has not apologised for the £3.3 billion—indeed, he said that it was £3.5 billion—that he has already cost this country. That sum is the equivalent of 2p on income tax.

The Minister could not respond to the points raised by hon. Members from Northern Ireland and could not assure them that the interests of Northern Ireland's farmers would be taken into account or given priority. They could be given priority because they know and can trace the history of their cattle, but nothing that the Minister said today will satisfy hon. Members from Northern Ireland that their interests are put first. It would make sense for us to get the ban lifted for Northern Ireland and then proceed to get it lifted for Scotland and England. That is surely the way forward, but nothing that the Minister said today suggests that that is his policy. Unless there is a dramatic change in the Government's policy, it appears that we shall be debating this matter right up until the general election.

I shall be brief, because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. I have often admired the Minister's rumbustious style in the House and the way in which he always attacks his opponent. He gives no quarter and very often asks for no quarter to be given to him. However, in this instance, the cavalier methods that he has deployed in Europe have displayed arrogance and pomposity. That pomposity is equalled only by his ignorance of the subject. He should resign and take with him the fag end of a Government of weary Willys and tired Tims. It is time for a new start. The Government have today shown that they have no solution to the problem and no idea how to get the ban lifted.

4.42 pm

Mr. Douglas Hurd (Witney): It is reasonable that the House should debate BSE yet again, but it is wholly ludicrous that it should do so in the terms suggested by the Opposition and exemplified by the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle).

In the past few days, I have read many unrecognisable things about my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister. I have worked closely with him for a good many years, at the Home Office and the Foreign Office, and developed a very warm admiration for his frankness, courage and sense of service. If he has one political failing, it is a failing that would not have counted against him in former times. As we have seen again today, he believes in debate and robust argument rather than the smooth soundbites which are fashionable and which for a moment—but only a moment—turn away wrath.

The Opposition have tried to pin on my right hon. and learned Friend and on the Government the entire responsibility for the crisis and for the loss and anxiety that have come with it. If, however, we look for the truth behind the headlines, we find something entirely different. We find the latest example of what can happen in a modern democracy when it faces an onrush of consumer anxiety. It has happened before and it will happen again, in different countries and in different ways; and any Government, and the House, need to consider how to deal with it.

This consumer anxiety can be sparked off, as it was in this case, by a scientific report; but, whatever the spark, it is fanned by the media into a forest fire. Within days, perhaps even hours, the flames of that fire beat on the man in charge. That man may be the chairman of Shell, as in the case of Brent Spar, or it may be my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, as in the BSE case. Within hours, they are pressed for absolute and specific answers to questions such as, "Is it safe?"

Mr. Sheerman *rose—*

Mr. Hurd: No, I had better make my speech.

Those Ministers are asked whether it is safe and are told that people do not want any of their glib, shilly-shallying, politicians' answers. People ask, "Can my children eat the stuff or not?"

The Minister turns to his scientists and is told:

"We are not in a position to confirm whether a causal link between BSE and human disease exists."

I am quoting the report of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee from 25 March last year. The scientists say that the risk is "extremely small" and that the implementation of this recommendation

"should further reduce the risk to minimum levels".

That is what the scientists say. They plead for more research, but that is as far as they will go, and I do not blame them—who could reasonably do so?

Scientists today are less dogmatic than they used to be. We know a great deal more but, as we increase our knowledge, the complexities and uncertainties also increase. The chain of cause and effect in such a matter is more complex than we supposed. Such abstract reflections are not very much use to the man or the Government in charge in the moment of crisis.

Surely there can be only three guidelines for a Minister's reaction in such a situation. First, he must publish what is known. As my right hon. and learned Friend was absolutely right to say, concealment would be the most fatal error. He was also right to say that the body entitled to know the facts first is the House. Secondly, the Minister has to frame policy as best he can in the light of what is known. Thirdly, he has to educate and persuade. In that context, I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's recent decision about the food safety adviser and the food council.

Consumer anxiety is probably greatest in the most prosperous societies. For example, the Americans were among the first—they were perhaps the first—to take measures against British beef, and the Germans would certainly have done so a good deal earlier had they not been constrained by European rules. Some consumers in very prosperous countries seem reluctant to accept that there is no such thing as a risk-free world. I should think that German children are more at risk being taken to school each morning along the autobahn than they could possibly be from eating British beef, but the autobahn risk—or the American motorway risk—is an old risk to which they are accustomed. In a sense, they have come to terms with it. The new risk, though it may be a lesser one, is strange to them and they clamour for it to be removed.

[Mr. Hurd]

Another difficulty facing people in a position of authority in such cases is that the scientific knowledge shifts under their feet, which must be a very uncomfortable feeling. The Minister, or the chairman of the company, knows that what he is saying may not be the scientific best assessment in a year or two years' time. He may not be on firm ground, but he is still being asked for firm answers all the time. Unless the House and the media understand this dilemma, we shall face it over and over again and we shall get into difficulty over and over again.

There have been two new developments in this case.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hurd: If I may, I will continue, as I know that many hon. Members wish to speak.

In the case of BSE, since last March, there have been at least two new developments in the scientific sphere, both of which have been mentioned in this debate. First, there was new thinking on the—perhaps 10 per cent.—possibility of maternal transmission. That development is important, but, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister said, it probably does not fundamentally affect the size of the problem. Secondly, last September, in *Nature*, Professor Anderson was more precise about an early end to BSE in the British herd. As my right hon. and learned Friend explained, that led the Government to delay conducting a selective cull—the accelerated slaughter programme which was part of the Florence agreement.

Throughout the difficulties, there have been those who exploit the anxieties and twist them to their own purposes. Although that may be inevitable, it is lamentable. Those people belong to various groups. On the continent, there are certainly those who believe that the situation is entirely the result of British perfidy in unloading on to their herds dirty feed that we banned here some time ago. In the United Kingdom, it is sometimes describe as a "continental plot" to destroy the British beef industry. The export ban, although clearly illogical and deserving opposition, is also quite clearly the result of intense consumer anxiety on the continent, as I have described. In those circumstances, Governments and consumers cannot be coerced; they must be persuaded. We must persuade them—whether they are German consumers, customers of McDonalds or, sadly, local education authorities in many authorities, including my own in Oxfordshire.

Time and again, however, the greatest exploiters of our anxieties have been the Labour party and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang).

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): And the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman).

Mr. Hurd: Yes; particularly the hon. Member for Peckham.

As Opposition Members often do, they had a choice between treating the situation as a national problem and crisis and joining in—as the Opposition sometimes do, particularly in international matters, as the Foreign Secretary knows—a national task of informing, educating, assessing risk and persuading. They could have taken the latter choice—as the Opposition sometimes do on matters in which the prosperity and security of many of our citizens are at stake. Just as my right hon. and learned Friend the Agriculture Minister had to take his decision within hours and come to the House, so the Opposition had to take their decision within hours. They took it, and they have consistently stuck to it ever since. They chose consistently and narrowly to exploit those difficulties for party advantage.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Hurd: If in the history of this Session of Parliament there has been a subject that is unsuited to constant party warfare, this is it.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman *rose—*

Mr. Hurd: After talking to farmers in my constituency, I am quite clear on the fact that farmers do not see the matter as the Opposition do. Farmers of course become indignant with the Minister, and then, as he described, they—perfectly understandably—change their position. They pressed him to take action, and he has taken it. Farmers of course are in ferment and are anxious, but they, and British consumers, do not regard the matter as a party political one, to be used to gain votes for one party or another.

Mr. Sheerman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Privy Councillors in the House have a great privilege in being called early in the debate and before imposition of the 10-minutes rule. Does that privilege include taking absolutely no interventions in their speeches? Is it not surprising—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. It is quite clear that the onus of allowing interventions rests with the hon. Member who has the Floor.

Mr. Hurd: I think that, over quite a number of years in the House, I have been generous in giving way—*[Interruption.]* I feel that, in the twilight of my political life, I might be allowed to make a short speech, which I am concluding, in my own way. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) is using the oldest trick in the game, to try to spoil the final seconds of a speech.

Mr. Sheerman: No, that is not true.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is also true that seated interventions are not acceptable. I expect the right hon. Gentleman to be heard quietly.

Mr. Hurd: I am just drawing to a close, very quietly, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Because of the interruptions, I merely repeat that, in the view of British farmers and consumers, if ever there were a subject unsuited to the type of perpetual sniping and

point scoring in which the Opposition have indulged since their strategic choice last March, it is this one. Although it has misfired, they have once again tried to mobilise their battalions and all the resources of hindsight to attack the Government. As we have seen, the attack is based on ignorance and prejudice. It deserves no support in the House, and I think that it will receive no support in the country.

4.54 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am glad to follow the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), because his speech contained at least some thoughtful substance. I wish the Minister had taken more note of that possibility in this debate. As this may be the last opportunity to do so, I should also like to say that I am delighted that the right hon. Member for Witney will move into such a very useful occupation after he leaves the House—in contrast to many other hon. Members when they retire from the Government Front Bench.

I am lucky to represent a livestock area; it is a great privilege and a great responsibility. I spent this morning in a Cornish livestock market, and much of the weekend on the telephone speaking to farmers across the country. Unlike the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), I am in close contact with the people most concerned and affected by the BSE experience. They say—with good reason—that they are deeply sceptical about the timing of this debate. In the dying days of this Parliament, the debate looks like a typical Westminster party game rather than a serious attempt to deal with the problems facing the industry.

Let us contrast the situation today with that on 25 June 1996, when a similar motion was debated in the House. The Prime Minister had just returned from his surrender in Florence. The previous day, he had announced, first, that the over-30-months cull would be completed by October; secondly, that the selective accelerated slaughter programme would begin immediately afterwards; and, thirdly, that from November the export ban would begin to be lifted. He told us the following:

"The targets we have set are ambitious. It is now up to us in this country—the farming and ancillary industries and the Government—to ensure that we meet them. The point is that this timetable is essentially in our hands."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1996; Vol. 280, c. 22.]

There was no mention of those targets from the Minister today. Indeed, if any Conservative Members are thinking of using the Conservative research department brief in this debate, I advise them against it, because the omission of that statement is one of many omissions and mistakes made by the teenage scribes in central office. The Minister said earlier that the removal of the export ban is "not in our gift". That is what he says now, but it is not what he or the Prime Minister said last June.

By last June, every farmer in the country knew that the management of the over-30-months cull was going gravely awry and causing great damage to much of livestock farming. So much damage was being done that, on the very afternoon on which the Prime Minister announced the outbreak of hostilities in his "beef war", he took responsibility for the slaughter programme away from the Agriculture Minister and handed it over to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

After four weeks in charge, and after having met many farmers across the country and shown that he was rather more responsive to their concerns and anxieties than the Agriculture Minister, the Chancellor met furious farmers whose cattle were not being taken for slaughter, as promised. He told them that he would stamp out mismanagement, profiteering and dodgy dealing—but the backlog continued to grow.

Simultaneously, the Agriculture Minister's ham-fisted diplomacy in Europe exacerbated the ill feeling already caused by the ludicrously counterproductive beef war, so even the export ban on derivatives was still in place. It still is. He showed no signs of preparing the detailed, factual, scientifically based working documentation that the Commission needed to help in our case for the resumption of exports. Not for nothing were foreign commentators referring to his antics as being like those of a

"Hogg in a China Shop."

That was the situation on Tuesday 25 June 1996. All those suffering from the BSE catastrophe were in despair at the Government's failure to accept their share of the blame and take a grip on the problem. For the farmers, the crisis was at its height, so that day we initiated a debate, similar to today's debate but with one important difference: we could have made a major change to what happened thereafter.

Would not one have expected the Labour party to support that motion? Some Labour Members did, but some, particularly among the Labour leadership, who had shamefully acquiesced in the xenophobic beef war in the previous few weeks, sat on their hands, stayed away and ignored the lessons of history.

We all know that when a Government are having trouble at home, an overseas diversion—preferably a little war—can be extremely convenient. Dictators have done that throughout history. The Labour party swallowed that one, too, but once it was seen that that little war was unpopular, Labour Members came round to our view that it was damaging British interests. I pay tribute to the 33 Labour Members who joined us in the Lobby, but where was their deputy leader then? He was propping up the Government.

The clue to the Labour party's current tactic is the precise timing of the announcement last Wednesday. On that day, the House was debating the police bugging Bill and we were treated to the nauseating spectacle of the shadow Home Secretary cosying up to the Home Secretary—a case of "man of Straw" adopts "Howard's way". A brave band of 20 Labour Members nevertheless stuck to their principles and voted for our reasoned amendment. Their deputy leader, however, suddenly became an expert in agriculture, despite the fact that he seemed to think that there was a Secretary of State in that Department.

I shall keep fond memories of the spectacle of the Labour deputy leader suddenly faced by Mr. Jeremy Paxman on "Newsnight" with a question about maternal transmission. His face was a picture. He obviously thought that maternal transmission had something to do with ambulances for mothers-to-be.

I am sad about the timing of this debate, but I want to follow the example of the right hon. Member for Witney and concentrate on what could be done now to mitigate the appalling problems that have arisen.

Naturally, there are continuing concerns about the over-30-months cull. The cut in compensation rates and then the change in the value of the green currency have

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meant a drop of some 13 or 14 per cent. The farmers who were caught with cattle on their holdings as a result of delays in the cull have had to feed and house them at extra expense, all because of the mismanagement of the cull.

However, I want to turn my attention to the selective, or accelerated, cull. There are five main areas of concern, the first of which is the detailed way in which it has been introduced—not the principle, but the practice. For example, in our brief debate on statutory instruments on 21 January, not one hon. Member from any party was prepared to defend the unprecedented definition of a herd which the Minister introduced. He was the only person to support that definition. It was a clear fix to reduce compensation sums, and it has huge financial consequences, particularly for closed herds, which are exactly what we want to encourage.

The South West National Farmers Union summed up that debate by saying:

"MPs raised all of the NFU's concerns on compensation, flexibility, timing and the definition of the herd. The Minister, in his summing up, ignored it all."

Secondly, Ministers have been reluctant to give precise estimates of the number of cattle that will be compulsorily selected for slaughter under the cohort scheme. This weekend, the experience of a farmer in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) was indicative and alarming. He has a closed herd of some 120 British Friesians with followers, and all his replacements have been home bred and reared for some 20 to 30 years. No suspect foodstuffs were used at any time and he uses only the minimum of bought-in feed. His calving is spread out throughout the year and he has no peaks or troughs. He has had only two BSE cases during the whole period.

When the Ministry vets visited that farmer last week, he could give them all the information they needed. Their first reaction was to estimate that more than 60 cows would have to go. Naturally, he was horrified; when they looked at the cohort calculations again, they reduced the figure to 46. That is still 38 per cent., yet that herd had only minimal BSE incidents.

Yesterday, I talked to another farmer who has had a rather higher incidence. He calculates that, according to the cohort calculations that the vets have given him, more than 50 per cent. of his dairy herd will have to go.

It will take years for those herds to gain their former strength. How can those farmers, with their careful breeding and replacement policies, expect to maintain the standard and quality that they have had in the past? Even if they wanted to, how could they get the stock at a price that they could afford? If every dairy herd is cut to pieces in that way, the effect will be devastating. What will happen to the price of good quality milkers? As I pointed out when the crisis first broke last March, importing replacement stock from countries with less effective controls than we have in Britain would be sheer lunacy. So where will they come from?

This is a far cry from the Conservative central office brief, which says:

"Even using the highest estimate for the voluntary part of the scheme, less than five per cent. of the national herd will be affected. For the vast majority of farmers, only a very small number of their animals (if any) will be involved."

As we all know, even farmers with a closed herd can find themselves in difficulty, but those who bought in at any time will have much more difficulty.

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston–super–Mare): Are the hon. Gentleman and his party in favour of the selective cull?

Mr. Tyler: We have made it quite clear that we now favour a selective cull. The hon. Gentleman will have heard me say that we are in favour of the principle, but the way in which the cohorts are being designed has nothing to do with Brussels. Brussels did not invent the scheme. It is entirely due to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The hon. Gentleman should know that better than anyone else.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): This is an extremely serious matter, which has not so far been touched on in the debate. It relates not to the Government's incompetence last year, but to what is happening now. The implications of the issue raised by my hon. Friend, particularly as they apply to the application by the Ministry of the Florence agreement cull, which is now under way, are extremely grave. I hope that the Minister will respond at the end of the debate on the precise implications of the second Florence agreement cull. If, as my hon. Friend suggests—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the right hon. Gentleman's intervention is becoming a short speech.

Mr. Tyler: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I wish to emphasise—I am sure that he agrees—that those figures are not dragged out of the air. They are based on the advice and experience of the Minister's own vets. It is no good the Minister going on the "Today" programme and denying their relevance. Those are the practical figures being given to hon. Members' farmers throughout the country by the Minister's vets.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: I shall not give way for the moment.

It would be horrendous if those figures were applied throughout the national dairy herd. We could end up with a third of the national dairy herd—850,000 animals—going for slaughter, and what for?

If, instead, the farming unions' original solution, which we backed at the time, had been adopted, the number would have been much more manageable. To have taken all cattle exposed to contaminated feed, and born before the ruminant ban took effect, would have been scientifically logical and resulted in less than 10 per cent. of the dairy herd being taken. Again, the teenage scribes in Conservative central office seem to think that beef cows live for seven or eight years—like dairy cows—which clearly they do not.

A straightforward cull, taking all appropriate cattle born before the registration system came into operation, would have been far more workable than either the 1996 OTM scheme or the 1997 selective scheme.

Thirdly, the Government have so mismanaged negotiations with their European Union partners that we still do not know whether the measures that they have

chosen to pursue will achieve anything. In January, hon. Members on both sides of the House pressed the Minister on that. We got no answer then and no answer today. We have heard only bluster and backpedal. The Government's failure to produce a working document last summer, to do the preparatory work for the new cull last autumn and even now to submit a workable scheme for certifiable herds—we have heard from the Minister that he still has not done that—mean that they cannot guarantee a time scale for the relaxation of the export ban. So much for the Prime Minister's promise, post Florence, that the timetable was in our hands.

Crucially, no progress has been made on the important traditional markets for British beef outside Europe. As the right hon. Member for Witney said, some of our best markets were closed to us before the European Union took action. Nothing has been done to reopen those markets. Most of the bans have been in place much longer than the EU ban. The Government's delaying tactics last year merely increased their permanence.

Again, the Conservative research brief is out of touch, as many hon. Members with farmers in their constituencies will know. To claim that the Florence failure was a victory would be laughable if we were not still so far from achieving anything eight months later.

Fourthly, there are continuing concerns in the agriculture community about the validity and credibility of the scientific explanations given by Ministers and their advisers. On the day of his announcement about the new food and safety adviser and the new advisory council, the Minister accepted my comment that the public now judged his assurances and those of his so-called experts as "untrustworthy and incredible". Given the long saga of misleading reassurance on BSE and similar issues, that is scarcely surprising.

For the Government continually to chant the mantra that they are acting on "the best scientific advice" surely means that they should do so in all particulars. Eighteen months ago, I challenged Ministers to examine the possible connection between the spread—not the cause—of BSE and the use during the appropriate period of organophosphorus warble fly treatments on cattle. Those highly toxic chemicals, similar in origin to nerve gases, have a proven effect on the central nervous systems of animals and humans. I asked at that time whether they could reduce the immunity of cattle to the BSE prion, and whether that could be the explanation for the rapid epidemic in this country, where OPs were used extensively during that period, while other countries had escaped with relatively few cases?

Ministers were dismissive of the theory. Today, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee and the European Commission are actively examining that possible link. Proof that OPs were a major reason for the BSE outbreak spreading so fast and so far here would clearly be relevant to the relaxation of the export ban. As those chemicals have long since been withdrawn because they are far too dangerous, such proof would help our case for opening up the export market. It might also radically alter the shape and scope of the new selective slaughter programme. Why has there been no mention of it from the Minister or in the research brief? Are Ministers embarrassed that they might be proved wrong yet again?

Where is the examination of the new work on maternal transmission that has been briefly referred to this afternoon? Is not there an important distinction between the two possible explanations: the transmission of infection from cow to calf; or inherited genetic susceptibility? Surely those explanations have different implications for the new cull. If the Minister is following the best possible scientific advice, what is his conclusion on that?

Fifthly, there is increasing alarm, not just among farmers, but among taxpayers, that the gross mismanagement of the over-30-months scheme will continue into the new slaughter programme. During the debate before the Christmas recess, I set out my concerns in full. A small cartel of large abattoirs and renderers has made millions of pounds in extra profits. That is on the record. Farmers and taxpayers have been shortchanged. Meanwhile, only 4 per cent. of the slaughtered animals have been incinerated and safely disposed of. The weekly cost of storing the remainder is £265,000—more than a quarter of a million pounds each week.

The Government's failure to take powers to deal effectively with the emergency—Ministers have acknowledged that they could have done so—has led to an economic, environmental and public health time bomb. Meanwhile, some of the big operators have made a killing.

Why is it taking more than 12 months to introduce competitive tendering? Every local authority in the country would have been forced long since to put such a scheme out to tender. Not in this case, even though it would be necessary under United Kingdom and European Union regulations if it was not claimed to be an appalling emergency. After 11 months, it is still said to be an emergency.

In the debate before Christmas, the Leader of the House promised answers to all the points that I had raised. The Minister and his colleagues have still given no answers and been suspiciously silent.

According to the Minister's own figures, published just a few weeks ago, farming incomes fell last year by 9.5 per cent. in real terms. Measures of cash flow, which the Ministry statisticians acknowledge

"reflect more closely the variations in incomes perceived by farm households",

showed a drop of 13.1 per cent. Those figures are averages, which are artificially improved by some of the good arable results, particularly for the largest holdings. The livestock sector has had a miserable year, but the Ministry had the nerve to gloat in its press release announcing the figures.

At the outset of this national crisis, my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and I—

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyler: Not now. I am about to complete my speech, and I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will wish to make his.

At the outset of the crisis in March last year, my right hon. Friend and I offered the Prime Minister and the Minister our co-operation, help and support. Even the Conservative research department acknowledges that we did not scaremonger. We made that offer because we represent, locally and nationally, some of the areas most affected by the devastation that has occurred since the

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crisis was triggered by the announcement in the House. The Prime Minister and the Minister ignored our offer and decided to go their own way. So be it.

It is nearly 50 years since a Minister of Agriculture took responsibility for a mistake in his Department, even though he was unaware of it at the time. He resigned. As a student of the British constitution, I was taught that Ministers of the Crown were accountable for everything that their Departments did or did not do. That used to be the proud claim of Ministers of honour and integrity. That is not so now. When the ministerial team at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food blundered with the negotiations abroad and the slaughter programme at home, the Prime Minister did not ask for their resignations. He simply took them out of the driving seat, and put the Foreign Secretary in charge of the first of those issues and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in charge of the second. Can one imagine Lord Hailsham suffering such a double indignity without resigning?

Through all the suffering of the past 11 months, we have heard a great deal of self-justification from the Minister and his colleagues. We have heard it again this afternoon. Until the National Farmers Union annual meeting a few weeks ago, when I managed to extract a half-hearted and muffled "sorry" from the Minister of State, there was no hint of acceptance of blame or responsibility. We and all the victims of the crisis might think differently about tonight's motion if the Minister had, just for once, substituted a note of apology for his usual arrogance.

5.18 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): My only comment on the speech that we have just listened to is that the leader of the Liberal Democrats has a bare-faced cheek coming in five minutes before his spokesman makes a speech and then telling us what has been left out from the first hour and a quarter of the debate. If is he going to interfere in debates in that way, I hope that he will do us the courtesy of listening to the debate before telling us what has been left out. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is off."] That just shows how interested he and the Liberal Democrats are in this topic. We shall manage very well without him.

I must begin by declaring an interest. I am part owner of a herd of beef cattle. The breeding animals are bought in, not bred at home, and we have had two cases of BSE, the last of which occurred a little more than four and a half years ago.

This debate and the events since 20 March last year are a classic case of parliamentary mischief-making. When the end of a Parliament is approaching and a Government have an uncertain majority, all Oppositions search and scratch around for any opportunity to squeeze the Government. We all understand that, but when the Opposition irresponsibly exploit a tragic catastrophe—where events beyond the experience of science have caused large financial losses and, more important, widespread apprehension—and thereby encourage even greater apprehension among the public, and when they let loose parliamentary hatchet men on the House, I must agree wholeheartedly with my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister's description of this debate as a political stunt. It is no more and no less.

I was intrigued when the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) complained that the early statement made on 20 March was inconclusive and needed more information and suggested that it led to uncertainty. The Opposition, of course, ignore the fact that, as I understand it, the statement was made on the day that the Government formally received the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee's advice. I can just imagine the tempest on the Opposition Benches if it had not been made. Opposition spokesmen really want to have it both ways, and they ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept one point: that the crisis was brought about by the Government's handling of the issue in the first 24 hours? Anyone involved in crisis management in large companies knows that if a crisis is not handled in the first 10 minutes, or at the latest 10 hours after it occurred, it will get out of control. In March, the Government introduced the crisis and failed to manage it.

Mr. Jopling: I regard that as a total distortion of the events in March and of what has happened since. I do not recognise the facts from what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Sir Jim Spicer: Was there not a leak on the morning to which my right hon. Friend has referred, which the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was going to exploit? If a statement had not been made on that day, the hon. Lady was prepared to table a private notice question and expose the whole matter. To call for an alternative approach is ridiculous.

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend is exactly right. There was a leak and Ministers had no option. They did the right and responsible thing at the time.

I think that this is only the second time that I have spoken in an agriculture debate since I left the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1987. It is necessary to make some points about the crisis and what has happened and deal with what I regard as important. I very much question the myth that has been encouraged by a number of Opposition Members over the past year, and previously—that, by feeding ruminant residues to ruminants, farmers were engaged in a new era of greed and avarice.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and I both have science degrees in agriculture, so he will know perfectly well—I am accusing not him but others—that all agriculture textbooks of the 1940s and 1950s, when I was a student, and all textbooks going back to the last century spoke of the regular, accepted agricultural practice of feeding, let us say, dried blood or bonemeal to animals. It was a standard practice and had been so for decades when I was first a student. That myth therefore ought to be put to bed.

I resent the way in which Opposition Members have also tried to spread the myth that beef is not safe. There is a raft of examples of that on the record. Many farmers have dismissed the myth and done their best to educate the public on the safety of beef by imparting one very simple fact. Scrapie, a kindred disease in sheep, has been known—I believe—for almost 200 years. Again, as a student, I remember learning about scrapie, yet, as far as

I know, people have been eating sheepmeat with impunity all that time and, even though it is well known that scrapie was a widespread disease among the national sheep flock, there has never been a suggestion that it is not safe. The logic should therefore surely be that, if sheepmeat has been safe all these years, so is beef.

Perhaps none of us has taken scrapie seriously enough. I do not know whether scrapie has played a part in the BSE epidemic; the facts would suggest that it probably has. I remember, as might my hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs, that, back in the 1960s, a well-known northern livestock dealer from Darlington, Mr. Alan Metcalfe, came to the House of Commons with, I think, members of the National Sheepbreeders Association. He certainly saw the Conservative and Labour Back-Bench agriculture committees. He told us that he believed that scrapie was potentially a very dangerous disease and that MAFF should start an eradication scheme. I guess—I remember the committee's impression distinctly—that he spoke mainly from instinct without too much scientific evidence. It just shows that we should not ignore the countryman's instincts.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jopling: No, I shall finish this point. I understand that Mr. Metcalfe also made recommendations to the Labour Minister of the day—I cannot remember whether it was Fred Peart or Cledwyn Hughes—and I am sure they are still somewhere in a cubbyhole in the Ministry. To be honest, neither we as parliamentarians nor MAFF took him very seriously, and perhaps we have all lived to regret it.

I want to follow very much what my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) said about my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister. When a Minister is confronted with something new, reaching into areas that are new to science, by the very nature of such events he is a sitting duck for a malicious Opposition seeking to score cheap points in the run-up to an election. It is easy to misunderstand the role of a Minister. Ministers have to take decisions on matters in which they are not experts, especially on advice from scientists and lawyers. A Minister rejects their advice at his peril. If he rejects the advice, uses his instincts and gets the decision wrong, he will be in trouble. Overturning the advice of scientists and lawyers is one of the surest ways for a Minister to get into trouble. In the case of BSE, no Minister from either party would have tried to second-guess the scientists.

New scientific evidence was coming forward all the time, which left Ministers hugely exposed. Much of the subject area is largely unknown to science. Policies needed to be changed because the scientific information had changed. New statements had to be made as new scientific evidence emerged. That was all grist to the malicious actions of the Opposition.

The other European states, the Commission and the Council of Ministers behaved unreasonably when they imposed the ban. I have no doubt that they were egged on by reading the statement, reported in the British press, made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East on 22 March 1996. He said that a ban would be prudent and Europe was able to repeat that to the Minister. The Opposition disastrously pulled the rug on the Minister and they should be ashamed of themselves.

The Government and Ministers have done their best, but everyone knows that they do not have the power to lift the ban. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister also had an added difficulty in Brussels because his European colleagues were understandably irritated by the growing stridency of Euro-scepticism in the United Kingdom.

Farmers are not usually backward in making their complaints known to Members of Parliament. All through this saga, I have been amazed by the small number of letters I have received from farmers. I represent probably one of this country's most distinguished areas for sheep and cattle—the south of the Lake district. I met my local National Farmers Union in January and, although BSE was top of the agenda, there was little rancour over the Government's handling of the situation. The Minister reacted speedily and undertook a huge operation, against a background of evolving scientific knowledge and advice that made matters doubly difficult, and it would be preposterous to condemn him tonight.

5.34 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The Minister of Agriculture must be getting desperate if he has to wheel out a former Foreign Secretary and a former Chief Whip to defend him.

I had hoped, when the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) rose to speak, that he would throw some light on his part in this sorry saga, because I thought that he was the Minister of Agriculture when BSE was first identified. What advice did he get and what did he do to contain this evil crisis? Could he have nipped it in the bud? He did not tell us. Instead, he told us that my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was responsible. She is an important and distinguished Opposition Front Bencher, but it is infantile to suggest that she could influence the beef market on mainland Europe to that extent.

Mr. Jopling: I have read a parliamentary answer which stated that Ministers were first told about the BSE situation in June 1987. That was a week or two after I left the Ministry, which was fortuitous timing from my point of view.

Mr. Home Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman is playing the part of the third wise monkey. I understand that BSE had been heard of in 1985—certainly in 1986—and perhaps he should have paid more attention to the papers circulating in his Ministry at that time.

I have to declare an interest in the subject. Only this morning, I was out in the rain feeding cattle. Many other people have an interest—some 600,000 jobs are directly involved in the production and processing of beef, ranging from farm workers, through hauliers and butchers, to caterers. Of course, we all, as consumers, also have an interest in British beef. The purpose of the debate is to make the point that the Government have abdicated their responsibility to all those interests in the past few years. The Government's response to BSE has been characterised by waste, incompetence and prevarication.

The Government's response has been characterised by waste, because £3.5 billion has been spent dealing with the crisis. I do not complain that the money has been spent, but it has not been spent effectively. The crisis is

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still here even after all that money has been spent. The resources should have been applied more prudently and effectively.

The Government's response has been characterised by incompetence, because Ministers have repeatedly failed to ensure that their stated policies are implemented properly. For example, the feed ban was introduced and then it was discovered, again and again, that the feed mills and merchants were not sticking to the rules. It has also taken far too long to ensure that the standards for slaughterhouses were applied and enforced effectively.

The Government's response has also been characterised by prevarication. For example, we saw a six-month delay in the accelerated cull agreed by the Prime Minister in Florence in June. From June to December, nothing was done. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said, the Government could have started to identify the cattle. In Northern Ireland, it would have been a straightforward matter to identify the 1,700 cattle that might have to be slaughtered under an accelerated cull scheme, because proper records are kept.

In Scotland, it is estimated that some 4,300 cattle will have to be culled, but they have started to be identified only in the past few weeks. In England and Wales, some 121,000 cattle need to be identified—heaven help us.

Sir Jim Spicer: The hon. Gentleman has roots in the farming community. Does he not understand the situation faced by farmers in my constituency? For example, the chairman of the local NFU had 103 cattle waiting to be culled at the end of September. What would his reaction have been if someone had said that his cattle needed to be checked, and that he would be given a list of the ones that had to be slaughtered? The chap would have been suicidal. The idea is ridiculous.

Mr. Home Robertson: The hon. Gentleman underlines the fact that the over-30-months scheme was not operating well at that time. But it would have been perfectly straightforward to begin the process of identifying the cattle to be dealt with under a selective cull in those areas where there was no backlog, such as Northern Ireland, Scotland and some parts of England and Wales. Prevarication has been the name of the game for the Minister, the Government and the Minister's predecessors, who thought that they could contain the problem. They hoped that it would go away, and they were under the illusion that consumers at home and abroad would be satisfied with bland assurances. Goodness knows, we have heard plenty of them over the years.

The Government could not recognise the threat of a multiple crisis when it hit them between the eyes. There was a crisis of animal health, a potentially serious risk to human health and a massive economic crisis. This crisis did not start last year, but has been bubbling away and threatening to explode since 1986–87. They have had time enough to consider it, but they have prevaricated. We can compare that with the reaction in other countries. The French, Germans and others in mainland Europe immediately introduced drastic eradication policies—slaughtering all contacts with BSE cases and offering full compensation to the farmers concerned. In that way, they have been able to keep the situation under control.

I had an informal conversation with the former Finance Minister of the Irish Republic, Michael O'Kennedy, who told me that he sought advice from his officials on what to do about cases of BSE in Ireland when cases were identified early on in the Republic. The advice was that eradication would be expensive, but that failure to eradicate would be a great deal more expensive. Unfortunately, this Government thought that they could get away with trying to contain it in the hope that it would fizzle out. Plainly, that was not going to happen.

We do not know what advice has been provided to Ministers by civil servants in MAFF, the Northern Ireland Office and the Scottish Office since 1987, and it will be interesting reading for historians when that material is published in the distant future. But my guess is that officials will have offered alternatives to Ministers, ranging from expensive plans to eradicate the disease and to research its causes, through to minimalist measures to try to fob off the public. Inevitably, the Minister and his predecessors chose the low-cost, high-risk options, which have led to a high-cost crisis. They must stand condemned, and that is what this debate is about.

I have mentioned that I am personally involved in beef farming, and I represent a lot of beef farmers in and around the Lammermuir hills in East Lothian. I know a little about beef production, which is now just about ticking over, after a fashion. But it is depressing—to put it mildly—for farmers and everybody else working in the industry to breed, feed, keep and try to finish specialist beef cattle when there is no market for them in many cases. There is a risk that they will end up in incinerators at the taxpayers' expense. We cannot go on like this.

I read a report a couple of months ago in the farming press in Scotland about a specialist producer of Galloway cattle. The report was concerned with a pure beef breed which—because they are slow-maturing cattle—could not be finished within 30 months. Therefore, the producer is considering putting all his calves from that pedigree herd of Galloway cattle into what is euphemistically described as a calf processing scheme—slaughtering the little things at birth. What is the sense in allowing that obscenity to continue in the agriculture industry?

It is absurd that this particular sector has become the focus of a major health scare, as beef farming is overwhelmingly extensive. I have only seen cattle grazed traditionally, and wintered on hay, silage and cereals in straw-bedded housing with appropriate minerals and protein supplements—when necessary—in winter only. Antibiotics are used only on specific veterinary advice when a beast gets ill. That is in marked contrast to other sectors in agriculture, such as the dairy, pig or poultry industries, where the livestock are housed intensively and fed on artificial compound feeds. No doubt that is perfectly safe, and I am not criticising those involved, but I find it extraordinary that the most extensive section of the industry has become the focus of such a health scare. It is bizarre that the beef sector has been branded as unnatural and unhealthy as a result of the BSE shambles.

The Government stand condemned for allowing such an absurd and damaging image of the industry to develop at home and in mainland Europe. The beef industry—from production to processing and marketing—is now in a state of collapse. The home market may have recovered well, but the hills and uplands of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England cannot remain in production for the United Kingdom market alone.

We must have access to export markets, and that is what is so stupid about the car stickers of Eurosceptics, which say "Stuff the EU—eat British beef". This is one sector where we depend almost totally on the mainland European market, which the Government have allowed to be destroyed by a full-scale food scare as a result of their awful relationships with our European Union partners.

It is important to recognise that the scare—both at home and, above all, in Germany—started long before the ban, and that the ban was a result of the scare, rather than the other way around. We must find a way out of this that will involve better relations with our European partners, and that will start only when this Minister has gone and a Labour Minister takes over. We need to look to bring British beef back on to the market in mainland Europe.

I should like to ask some specific questions of the Minister, as it is not clear how that can be done under present circumstances. When a case of BSE is discovered in the rest of the EU, it is the herd associated with the animal concerned that is flagged up as possibly infected with BSE. Here in the UK, it is the farm that is flagged up as irrevocably infected, and there is no way out of it. We have heard about the United Kingdom certified herd scheme and the beef assurance scheme. One of the main principles of the certified herd scheme refers to herd history, and states:

"the animal was born in a herd which had never had a case of BSE and in which no suspect BSE case is under investigation; and the animal had not entered or moved through any herd in which a case of BSE had been confirmed in the six years before the animal's slaughter."

The beef assurance scheme, which may explain this more clearly, states:

"The herd must not contain animals originating from dairy herds, including bulls and first cross dairy animals."

As I understand it, that will cover practically every beef herd in the United Kingdom, because most commercial beef herds work with cows that have been bred out of the dairy herd—Hereford Friesian, Angus Friesian and Limousin Friesian cross suckler cows. A high proportion of cattle come from the dairy herd, so how on earth can Northern Ireland farms or Scottish farms which fall into that category satisfy these criteria? The Minister must explain that.

The time has come for a fresh approach to this whole area of policy in the United Kingdom. To do that, we need a fresh start in our dealings with the EU. For a kick-off, that means that this Minister has to go, and this Government must go also—the sooner the better.

5.47 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), because he is an unusual person. He is a Labour Member who knows something about agriculture, and takes some interest in it. That highlights the purely opportunistic nature of this debate—that, of all parties, the Labour party should seek to use an agricultural issue in this way. I pay tribute to certain Labour Members, who are regular attenders, but the average attendance of Labour Members in agriculture debates is pretty low. Some of us are veterans of these BSE debates and can see that in perspective.

The more recent speeches have significantly raised the tone of this debate. We are talking about serious issues. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) made a point that those of us who take an interest in the subject and care about agriculture would support: this crucial matter should not have been turned to narrow party political advantage as is being done at the moment.

My right hon. Friend spoke of the difficulties of having to stand at all times on scientific advice. When I was a Minister in the Department of the Environment, dealing with radioactive waste management, I had to deal with the current conventional advice—it has changed significantly—and with the problems of getting accurate scientific advice. That is one reason why I wonder whether the scientific advice given to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister—which I accept that he has no alternative but to accept—is right.

I have been pestering my right hon. and learned Friend for a proper consideration of the theories that have been advanced for a considerable time by my constituent, Mark Purdey, and by Dr. King from Oxford, who has conducted exhaustive research into the possible implication of organophosphate pesticides in a complicated and involved way.

We do not yet know whether there is a link between CJD and BSE or whether scrapie-infected feed is the cause. We are dealing with probabilities. That is the awful uncertainty of the present situation. Faced with that, and with my right hon. and learned Friend's difficulties in dealing with all the issues, it is wonderfully easy to approach the problems with hindsight. Several Opposition Front Benchers, and the hon. Member for East Lothian, completely overrode the problems and the issues about whether we could have embarked on a selective cull earlier.

As I remember it, every slaughterhouse was full, there was a huge waiting list of people who were seriously concerned to move animals out of the over-30-months scheme, and my right hon. and learned Friend was engaged in trying to agree with Europe a basis on which a selective cull could go ahead, with some understanding from Europe that, if we went ahead on that basis, it would be possible to lift the export ban. The hon. Member for East Lothian ignored that point.

Nothing would have been sillier than to embark, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) suggested, on our own scheme, which might have led to the slaughter of many extra cattle, and then to be told by Europe that that was nothing to do with the basis on which it would agree to the lifting of the ban. It would have been fatuous to proceed without a measure of agreement from Europe.

The debate has been put in context for me by a farmer from East Antrim, I believe, who was interviewed on Radio 4. He was one of that wonderful breed of Ulster farmers whom I knew well: staunch, high-quality, committed, serious farmers. He saw the debate for what it was. He was asked whether he thought that the Minister should be condemned and censured for what he had done. He made it quite clear that he was much more concerned about treating the matter as a serious agricultural issue, and that he was not impressed by party games of the kind that are being played here.

I was not at all surprised when my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) said that a representative of the National Farmers Union in Somerset said that we needed this debate like a hole in the head. Labour Members such as the hon. Member for East Lothian complain about the market and ask how we

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can rebuild public confidence and why we cannot get more outlets for our beef, yet they support their Front Benchers who are launching yet another damaging and destructive attack, the only effect of which will be to revive concerns about beef nationally.

Mr. Home Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman has problems understanding what the Government undertook to do at Florence in June. The presidency conclusions state:

"The framework stipulates the action which the United Kingdom is taking, and is committed to take in the future, in order to accelerate the disappearance of the disease."

The details are there; the agreement was made. I appreciate the difficulties that there may have been in parts of England, but why on earth could not the accelerated cull have gone ahead in Northern Ireland and Scotland?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the framework was agreed but we had yet to get agreement with Europe on the details; the silliest thing would have been to go ahead without that agreement.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said on the radio this morning, and repeated in the Chamber, that the crisis had been handled disastrously and was costing us £4 million a day. Labour Members like to give that impression, but one cannot pin them down. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) asked how much money Labour would be prepared to spend, and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East said that he was coming to that. He made a brief comment about slaughterhouses, saying that they overcharged, and that point was dealt with by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister, who pointed out that the original charges proposed were subject to revision and, as I understand it, that people were paid at that revised rate.

As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East made no further comment, I take it that Labour would have spent every penny that the Government spent, other than the excess slaughterhouse charges. Perhaps the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) would like to comment on that. We have had no response to that point. Labour Members give the impression that they would not have wasted the money, but when challenged they make only the minor point about the slaughterhouses.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Gentleman referred to a person in Northern Ireland whom he heard speaking on the radio. Perhaps that person should reflect on one fact: he and his herd will get through the hoop because of traceability, because at some time in the past some enlightened person decided to develop a scheme in Northern Ireland that will take it through what will prove to be an obstacle for the rest of the United Kingdom.

Perhaps that person would like to know that we in the United Kingdom debated that very scheme in 1990—seven years ago. It was argued about in Parliament and was the recommendation of a Select Committee that had heard plenty of evidence, yet the Government rejected it. The right hon. Gentleman talks about savings: that is where the savings would have been. A few tens of millions of pounds spent in 1991–92 would have saved thousands of millions today.

Mr. King: That is another wonderful example of the hindsight that is introduced into these matters. I do not need any coaching from the hon. Gentleman on the situation in Northern Ireland; I am somewhat familiar with it.

It is no secret that I have been critical of some of the aspects of the way in which the schemes and the problems that we have encountered on the way have been managed, but I hope that I can distinguish between criticisms of the handling of a genuinely difficult and complicated situation and the ludicrous attempt to blow up the matter into the charge made against my right hon. and learned Friend.

There is a serious point that those of us who are concerned about the workings of government should consider. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is a small Ministry, and it has been tested in its systems and procedures by some of the challenges that have been posed to it by having to implement European policies and agreements, such as price arrangements, which are often extremely complicated and arrived at extremely late, while farmers clamour for information. That has been a problem for it, and I have not been an unqualified admirer of some of its communication skills in that respect. That was also the case with the difficulties in the introduction of the integrated administration and control system.

It is unrealistic to expect a Department such as MAFF to take a crisis of the scale of BSE in its stride. My comment is not particularly directed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture but to Sir Robin Butler as head of the civil service. If MAFF had been able to deal with the crisis in its stride, it would have invited serious questions about its previous staffing levels. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witney rightly mentioned how such challenges can emerge much faster now, and present greater difficulties. For efficient administration, the operation of the civil service must be flexible enough to bring into play the resources that are needed to provide the service and response that the industry and the public are entitled to expect. That posed major problems. It was bound to be difficult.

I lived through the experience of the Ministry of Defence during the Gulf war. I saw how a sudden extra challenge can impose completely different work loads on people. It was different in the MOD, which is huge. It can cope, because there is more flexibility. MAFF did not have that, and I do not think it got the support from outside that could have helped.

Another lesson needed to be learned. I did not think that the industry covered itself with roses. Reference has been made to the profits made by people in different parts of the industry. Undoubtedly, some people exploited the situation against the interests of their fellows in the industry—against some of the people with whom they work. I hope that there will be a proper investigation of the conduct of some people involved in the industry.

Mr. Tyler: I am following the right hon. Gentleman's speech with great interest, because I have much sympathy with it. Will he join me in requesting that the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee examine what has happened with the over-30-months cull? I share his concern that it seems that huge sums of money have been made through profiteering, while his and my farmers have suffered.

Mr. King: I have no doubt that the matter will be investigated under normal audit procedures. The key to

dealing with this crisis was taking action to save the industry. That was the objective set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and achieved by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister. Substantial sums of money were put in and there was an enthusiastic response, but we must ensure that public money is responsibly spent.

I look at this debate against that background. If we are to believe reports in the newspapers, the Opposition have a problem about the number of seats available in any Cabinet that they might form. It is suggested that, under a Labour Government, the Minister of Agriculture would be downgraded to a Minister of State, and would not be in the Cabinet. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members need not complain. That is an honest appreciation by the Leader of the Opposition of the standing of agriculture in the Labour party. It is the standing it has always had in the Labour party.

The other remarkable thing, which may send a shiver down the spines of my farmers—it certainly sent one down mine—was the presence of the deputy Leader of the Opposition.

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Mr. Tim Boswell): The brief presence.

Mr. King: His brief presence. I understand that the deputy Leader of the Opposition is looking for a job, but is not clear what job he will get. The awful thought suddenly came to me, "My God, is it possible that this is to be his new assignment?" If there was no humour in our political life, this would be a sad place. I understand that he is to be given a task force of 25 Labour Members who will go to marginal Conservative agricultural seats and terrify sitting Conservative Members by talking straight to the farmers about what a Labour Government might do. As the Duke of Wellington said, I do not know what they will do to the enemy, but my God, they frighten me. I would welcome such a visit, because I have never counted more than five or six Labour Members in an agriculture debate. I would love to see them turn out 25 and come to my constituency, to show how little the Labour party knows about farming.

The challenge to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister in this outrageous motion is met by one simple, direct answer. My right Friend the Prime Minister said, faced with this appallingly difficult challenge and crisis, that we would save the industry. I look straight into the eyes of Opposition Members and ask them whether they honestly believe that a Labour Government would have been prepared to make the funds available to meet the challenge and save the industry.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) gave it away when he talked about schools, hospitals and alternative uses for the money. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister played a crucial part in securing the funds that have enabled the industry to continue and to have a chance of recovering from this terrible crisis. That is why the motion should be treated with contempt.

6.5 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Thank you for calling me early in the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) mentioned the cost of the catastrophe, which was £3.3 billion. A parliamentary reply that I received last week showed that only £546 million of that has gone in compensation to farmers—only one sixth of the total. Where has the rest of the money gone?

I am surprised that so many Conservative Members, including the Minister of Agriculture, felt that it was improper for us to call a debate on the handling of the BSE crisis and table a vote of censure. Over the past 20 years, the Government have created a unique catastrophe. I can think of no parallel where a Government have at every stage been responsible for creating such a unique British problem—a unique Conservative Government problem. They changed the rules and brought about BSE, which, so far, has cost us £3 billion. That is a fair and proper subject for debate. If we did not continually raise it on the Floor, we would be failing in our duty as an Opposition.

The roots of the problem go back to 1980 and the change in conditions for rendering. Lower temperatures were allowed and the scrapie prion went through the processes, producing the BSE prion. It was identified in 1986 and investigated. The Government were slow to pay proper compensation to farmers. That led to many BSE cases going unreported and into the food chain. For a year or 18 months, the Opposition argued for 100 per cent. compensation. The Government took at least that time before they finally agreed. Eventually, when they realised the seriousness of the problem, they introduced a feed ban in 1988, but, incredibly, they did not police it. It was May last year before we could finally have confidence in the ban being properly implemented. The so-called party of law and order failed to implement its orders for the agricultural industry.

Many comments have been made about whether we were following good science. I followed the matter in the late 1980s and into the 1990s and I have attended virtually every BSE debate. I promise the House that no scientist throughout that time ruled out the connection between BSE and Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease. It was always possible—it could never have been ruled out—yet the Government continued to maintain that beef was perfectly safe. In December 1995, the Secretary of State for Health said that it was "inconceivable" that CJD could be caused by BSE. Ministers were corrupting scientific advice; no scientist said that the link was inconceivable—it was Ministers who used that word.

Just three months later, on 20 March 1996, Ministers had to come to the House and make those extraordinary statements—extraordinary because of the complete denial of previous years. There should never have been those absolute, categorical and complete denials. When those statements were made, it was obvious that they would shake the confidence of British and European consumers. It would have been prudent—if I can use that word again—for the Minister of Agriculture to have had informal discussions with his European counterparts before making his statement to the House. There had been an Agriculture Council just three days previously, to which the Minister sent as his deputy the Minister of State in his capacity as Fisheries Minister. Surely, over a meal or drinks or coffee at that summit meeting, it would have been possible to have warned our continental colleagues that there was a problem that would have to be announced to the House.

We have heard several comments about the statement on 22 March by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang). I remember well seeing in

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the newspapers and other media the following Sunday the Minister talking about a cull of 4 million cattle. What was the effect of that? Throughout the debate, we have been told that we should blame my hon. Friends the Members for Edinburgh, East and for Peckham (Ms Harman)—blame Labour—but what about the Minister himself talking about the slaughter of 4 million cattle? He was only stopped by the Chancellor, who pointed out the cost of such a programme in a special Cabinet meeting. I blame the Minister for being one of the catalysts in multiplying the costs of the programme.

On the question of the Minister's competence in handling the crisis over the past 12 months it must be said that the over-30-months slaughter programme ran into massive logistical problems and a backlog built up. I have a rural constituency with a scattered population and I probably represent more farmers than any other Member of Parliament, because farms in my area are small. Relative to those in England, my farmers are poor and I promise that, in the past 12 months, they have experienced the worst nightmare of their lives. The over-30-months slaughter programme ran into serious problems and the Government should have acted much more decisively and intervened more vigorously. Only large abattoirs were used, when there was a plethora of small abattoirs—some in my constituency have been closed recently—which could have been brought into use for that scheme.

I now turn to the policy of non co-operation with the European Community during May and June, leading up to the Florence summit. With hindsight it can be seen that that was a catastrophic error in terms of our relations with the European Community. These were the people with whom we had to negotiate to get the ban lifted, yet we vetoed every measure during those six weeks to two months. At the Florence summit, we at least found our way out of that silly non co-operation policy. Like many other hon. Members, I was present in the House when the Prime Minister made his extraordinary statement, dissembling the results of the Florence agreement. He said that a framework was in place for lifting the ban and that that would happen progressively between October and November. He said that the

"timetable is essentially in our hands."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1996; Vol. 280, c. 22.]

It was simply a matter of introducing the accelerated slaughter programme.

I do not accept the logistical problems hinted at by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare and others. There were severe problems with the over-30-months scheme, but those problems did not exist in Northern Ireland and Scotland or in certain parts of the United Kingdom and the accelerated slaughter programme could have gone ahead much earlier. The problem was that the Minister, having signed the agreement, simply did not believe in it himself. He and the Government lost six months for all our beef farmers in the fight to remove the ban. I am glad that the order eventually passed through the House in January and that the programme is now under way, but as we speak—eight months after Florence—not a single animal has been killed under the programme.

As for the certified herds scheme that was part of that agreement, there has still been no discussion. The detailed documents have not reached the European Community and the Minister's refusal to appear before a Select Committee of the European Parliament was absolutely absurd and unwise in the extreme. These are the people who are responsible for the ban and with whom we have to negotiate, so—even if only as a gesture of good will—we should have gone to put our case to them.

I have had regular meetings with farmers in my constituency during the past 12 months—we have met at least nine or 10 times. Three weeks ago, I spent two and a half hours in discussion with the National Farmers Union on various issues, but at least a third of that meeting consisted of discussing the BSE problem. Farmers in my area and elsewhere have almost lost hope of ever seeing the ban lifted under the present Minister of Agriculture. They realise that, if there is a Labour Government, the ban will be lifted much earlier than any Conservative Government can ever achieve.

There is deep mistrust of the Minister among his counterparts in Europe and a lack of good will towards Britain—we are now isolated in Europe. The Conservative party is now campaigning on an anti-European platform—not only a Eurosceptic platform but a highly destructive one. Farmers realise that the common agricultural policy is fundamental to the running of agriculture and that good will from Brussels is vital, but we have destroyed that, chunk by chunk, over the past few months of this crisis.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us what extra steps he thinks a Labour Government would take in order to get the ban lifted—what magic would a Labour Government have?

Mr. Williams: I am moving on to talk about Northern Ireland, which is crucial in tonight's debate for political reasons, but which also points to the way ahead in the BSE crisis. I shall address the hon. Gentleman's question in that part of my speech.

The incidence of BSE in Northern Ireland is only around 2,000 cases—about 1 per cent. of the total in Britain. That is because, generally, agriculture in Northern Ireland is not intensive and is far more natural, so the cattle are grass-fed. About 96 per cent. of Northern Ireland's herds are unaffected by BSE and half of its beef is for export. Under the certified herds scheme that was agreed in Florence we are required to bring forward detailed documents for discussion. We had a debate on BSE on 13 November 1996 during which there were several references to the certified herds scheme. The hon. Members for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) asked about the progress of the scheme. I think that they were all quite taken aback when they found that the papers had not even been presented to Brussels at that stage.

We sought a promise from the Minister of Agriculture in that 13 November debate, but he told us:

"We have not yet submitted detailed working papers".

Later in the debate, he said:

"The Commission and the commissioners have not had those formal working papers."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 368-71.]

The impression that we were given, however, was that the papers were on their way.

We had another debate on the subject on 21 January, when we discussed the accelerated slaughter regulations. This time, it was the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) who raised the progress of discussions about the certified herds scheme. The Minister said:

"We are ready with a proposal for a certified herds scheme to submit to the Commission. I anticipate submitting our proposals early next month."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1997; Vol. 288, c. 849.]

"Early next month" meant early February, but, on 17 February—three months after the November debate, and a month after that last statement—we are still waiting. Why have the proposals still not gone to Brussels?

What worries me—I am sure that it also worries Northern Ireland Members, and it certainly worries farmers in my constituency—is that, whenever it comes to discussions about the certified herds scheme, our colleagues in Europe simply will not listen to the British Government. I fear that, whatever deal the Government may try to strike with Northern Ireland Members today, they will not be able to hold to their side of the bargain. The matter is beyond their control, owing to the current bad faith between the Minister of Agriculture and our colleagues in Europe.

Let me return to what was said by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson). I think that a certified herds scheme is unquestionably the answer. Although it is clear that Northern Ireland will be most involved initially, its involvement will be closely followed by that of Scotland and, over a period, other parts of the United Kingdom. After three years, or perhaps five, as BSE recedes, all our cows will qualify.

Let me say something to Ulster Members. Tonight's vote will be important to their farmers, who want the ban lifted as soon as possible. If the Government win votes this week, the election will be on 1 May, but if they are defeated the lifting of the ban will be potentially six weeks closer. The Government are thoroughly discredited among the public, and the BSE problem constitutes an appropriate long-term tribute to what they have managed to do in the past 20 years.

6.23 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): A few days ago, Labour party briefing was saying that this was the debate that would shake the Government to their foundations, but this morning the briefing had changed. Labour Members ought to listen to this so that they are "on message", as the new spin doctors say. Labour's briefing changed: this was the debate that would be out to wound rather than kill.

I came to the debate expecting passion, decisiveness and enthusiasm, but instead I heard the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang). I heard him stumble; I heard him unable to explain what magic ingredient Labour would bring to the problem if it were ever trusted with it; I heard him unable to take interventions. Looking behind him, I saw that fewer than 50 Labour Members had come to support him. They obviously knew how bad he was going to be.

Even worse for the hon. Gentleman, I noticed that the Labour leader was not present. And, even worse than that, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson)—the puppet master of the shadow Cabinet; the man who writes the lines that the others have to say; the man who briefs against those who do not say the right lines—was not present. He clearly knew that this would not be a cracking good speech. It would, however, be unfair to blame the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. Nowadays, Labour policy and Labour approaches are governed on a soundbite-a-day basis, the soundbites being strictly rationed by Mr. Campbell and the hon. Member for Hartlepool. They fashion the soundbites, and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East attempts to translate them into Scottish and to deliver on the Floor of the House.

The BSE problem presents new Labour with an especially difficult conundrum. New Labour wants to be loved by everyone. On the one hand, it wants to be loved by the farmers. It is strange that new Labour now thinks that the deputy leader of the Labour party might help to win the love of the farmers, and is targeting him in their constituencies. On the other hand, it wants to be loved by the consumers, the food pressure groups and all the journalists who took a different line at the outset of the problem.

What do you do if you want to be loved by two groups who are potentially opposed to each other, if you have never knowingly stood up to an opinion poll in your life and said that it might be wrong, and if you have never knowingly stood up to a focus group in your life and said that that might be wrong? You have to agree with all sides at the same time—or at different times—and hope that no one notices that you are saying different things.

I have a piece of advice for the member of the shadow Cabinet who is cursed with the agricultural task. If he wishes to have real influence over the leadership—the leadership that spurned his speeches, and does not seem to give him much backing—he should resign from the shadow Cabinet and join a focus group, or the press office of the Leader of the Opposition. That is the way in which things are done, and changed, in the modern Labour party; that is the way in which any shadow Cabinet member must proceed if he becomes serious about wanting to influence policy and affect the daily soundbite.

A far more important question, however, lies at the kernel of the issue that we are discussing—a question that has affected livelihoods throughout the country, and matters very much to farmers and all in the meat trade. What have our European Government been doing to help solve the problem? Did not that Government—the Commission and its supporters—turn a problem for British agriculture into a mighty crisis? Was it not their ban that cut off, overnight, a £500 million export market for this country? Was it not their ban that stopped British farmers selling high-quality British beef that was perfectly safe to eat, except in the British marketplace? Was that not what undermined confidence on the continent of Europe?

Mr. Gordon Prentice: What undermined confidence more than anything else, surely, was a failure to reinforce the rules and regulations that would have made the meat that was coming out of abattoirs safe.

Mr. Redwood: The problem with the European Government's action is that they have accepted that our beef is safe enough for British people to eat. How, then, can they say that it is not safe enough for people in other countries to eat? That is the essential illogicality. Our European Government—the Commission and all its staff—did not make the allegation that the hon. Gentleman has just

[Mr. Redwood]

made, that the regulations were not properly enforced; they have been saying that British beef is safe for British people to eat, but not safe for anyone else to eat. How can they say that if they truly care about Britain, her trade and her businesses? Why do they not have the courage to recognise that, if British beef is safe enough to eat here, it is safe enough to eat in the Commonwealth and—although perhaps the Germans will not want to buy it—in all those countries throughout the world where people would like to buy our beef and should be free to do so.

Mr. David Nicholson: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that what caused maximum offence in this country, especially in farming communities, was, first, the fact that the European ban applies not only to European markets but to every market in the world and, secondly, the fact that, if this country were minded—as it might have been—to stabilise the situation by applying a temporary ban on import of beef from Europe, that would be ruled illegal by the various machinations in Brussels and Luxembourg.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend has made two very powerful points. Indeed, his second point was to be the next point of my speech.

My second question to our European Government is, by what right—by what legal means—have you banned the export of our beef to non European Community countries?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the Commissioner said that he would be delighted to eat English beef. If he could eat it, surely the rest of the people of Europe could eat it—except that he has a different Dutch stomach from the rest.

Mr. Redwood: I am very grateful for that point as well. Unfortunately, the Commissioner cannot be with us tonight, like the leader of the Labour party in the earlier part of our proceedings, but I hope that a copy of *Hansard* will be sent to the Commission so that the Commissioners can read that and other powerful points.

The British Government were right to contest the legality of the beef ban. The judgment of the European Court of Justice says that the beef ban will have to stay in place; I find that very curious. That appears to be the implication of the noises coming from the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, when I looked into this matter some months ago, I discovered that the beef ban that the EC has enforced on our exports is based on an assumption that, having gone to a third country, such as Sri Lanka or South Africa, the beef would be re-exported back to EU countries? I find that inconceivable.

Mr. Redwood: It would be an unlikely journey for such meat and it would be possible to prevent that by proper controls of shipments and at ports of entry into the European Community.

I believe that we must address this issue again in the intergovernmental conference. For me it is further proof, if any were needed, that we need a different relationship with the European Court of Justice from the one that we currently have. We demand fairness and a court of justice that puts justice first and is not political in its decisions. This court is too politicised, and it has now decided that its main task is to advance the federal power of the European Community, rather than to give justice to the British Government, in cases such as this.

My third question to the European Government is, will you consider the evidence of BSE in herds outside the United Kingdom? There is evidence of BSE cases in the Republic of Ireland, Portugal, France and probably other European Community countries. Surely, if the Community is primarily worried about this issue and not about something else, it would want to enforce the rules throughout the Union, and it should want a system for dealing with BSE that is fair to us and to countries that are starting to report cases.

It defies logic to suggest that we can have a BSE problem in this country and that there can be no problem elsewhere in the European Community. There has been so much trade in cattle and feedstuffs, and there was so much common practice in the agriculture on the continent and that on the mainland of the United Kingdom, that there must be a problem elsewhere in the European Community—one which the European Government should address with equal strength and equal purpose.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): While the right hon. Gentleman is apportioning blame, would he care to comment on the fact that, the year after the Government announced the Bovine Offal (Prohibition) Regulations to the House of Commons in 1988, contaminated ruminant feed exports to the European Union doubled in 1989 and, five years later, in 1994, we were still exporting that contaminated feed to the European Union?

Mr. Redwood: It sounds as though the hon. Gentleman is making my point. He is saying that the European Government were not vigilant enough and were not controlling that trade, which affected the entire European Community; that is his charge. I am saying very clearly that it is the responsibility of the European Union to take sufficient action across the Union—not to single out one country, but to ensure that it has common rules that apply in every member state which are up to the job at the time when there is believed to be a problem.

It is most important that we go on from this debate to Amsterdam and beyond to get a better relationship with the European Community, so that it can address the problem—in this case, BSE and the quality of herds and cattle throughout the European Community—rather than pursuing a political agenda and using a specific proposal to do so.

It is the wish of members of the Opposition to cut the salary of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I do not begrudge him his money and I shall vote accordingly tonight, but I have one piece of advice for him. He has become used to appearing in the cartoons. Perhaps some of the £1,000 that we shall try to keep in his pocket might go towards a new hat, to give them even greater delight.

6.35 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): No one would deny the tragedy of BSE for the farming community, but as ever in these debates we are too quick to forget the

tragedy it has been for many thousands of other ordinary men and women who have lost their jobs and those in the meat processing industries who have even lost their homes as a result. We should spare a thought for them and deeply regret the fact that, so far, the Government have been unable to find a way of helping that large section of the community which has suffered; it has not been helped by any government money or taxpayers' money. I am sorry for the people in many of the sad cases of which we have all heard—not only the ordinary men and women who have lost their weekly wages, but those who have lost their very homes as a result.

Northern Ireland has figured very largely tonight—not for the first time in such debates. Northern Ireland figures in them because of the very high standards of health that we enjoy in both animals and crops, largely brought about by the long-term objectives of the Northern Ireland Government—indeed, of the Government in Dublin—who have capitalised on the very high health standards that were possible because of the double water barrier between ourselves and the continent of Europe. I fear that, to some extent, that quality has been eroded as a result of common market levelling down rather than trying to level up throughout the Community.

We have the tremendous advantage of traceability in the Northern Ireland herd, which is now standing us in good stead. It is that which sets Northern Ireland apart in Europe more than anything else, and it is that which gives Northern Ireland the tremendous advantage which it enjoys in regard to breaking the ban—getting the ban lifted on Northern Ireland beef in Europe, or rather on United Kingdom beef being sold in Europe.

I listened carefully to the Minister and I felt a measure of hope arising from his words. I hope that perhaps someone can go a bit further later in the debate and say what the chances actually are of getting the ban lifted throughout the United Kingdom. If we wait until every suspected animal is slaughtered, there will never be a chance of getting the ban lifted. The first approaches to Europe to have the ban lifted must be made as soon as the slaughter scheme begins.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *indicated assent.*

Mr. Ross: I see the Minister nodding agreement with that.

It is likely that a few cases of BSE will continue to turn up every year for quite a long time ahead, and we do not want the European nations always to be in a position to say, "There was another case last week, so we shall delay." That would be unacceptable to any hon. Member. We must start to make progress as soon as the accelerated slaughter scheme starts.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): One thing that is baffling and mystifying to a layman like me is why there seems to be so much more BSE in Northern Ireland than in the Republic of Ireland. To follow the hon. Gentleman's point, if there is the occasional case of BSE in Northern Ireland in the future, will there not also be the occasional case in the Republic of Ireland in the future? If beef from the Republic of Ireland is allowed to go anywhere in Europe, why should not Northern Ireland beef also do so?

Mr. Ross: The Republic escaped the initial ban and had a different way of dealing with the problem. As the Minister pointed out earlier, there have been more cases in the Republic over the past month or two than in Northern Ireland. I do not want to pursue that, as I am dealing particularly with the situation in the United Kingdom and our hopes for having the ban on UK beef lifted.

The Minister should push very hard for Northern Ireland as soon as he possibly can. If Europe is not prepared to accept Northern Ireland beef, there is scant chance of it accepting beef from any other part of the United Kingdom. As I have said from the onset of the debates and negotiations, Northern Ireland is the key. We should use the high quality and traceability of its beef to force the door open. It should act as a litmus test of the good faith of those in Europe who demand that we must be completely clear to their standards, rather than to a reasonable standard that would be acceptable to anyone else.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Will the hon. Gentleman take on board the fact that in November, during the first debate on BSE, all the matters that the hon. Gentleman is drawing to the Minister's attention were forcefully underlined by several Northern Ireland Members? The papers had not been presented then and they have not been presented now. There is absolutely no evidence that the Minister has done anything that would afford any joy whatever to Ulster Unionist Members.

Mr. Ross: I am concerned about whether the Minister's actions are giving hope to the farmers of Northern Ireland, rather than to politicians in the House. The needs of the farming community should be paramount—rather than pleasing political figures. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) will get a chance to make his own speech later in his own way, and no doubt he will seize the opportunity, should he catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the welter of figures that have been presented, one or two small items seem to have escaped some people. Twice today, hon. Members—one from each side of the House—said that Northern Ireland exported half its beef. That is incorrect. Northern Ireland exports some 80 per cent. of its beef, and it accounted for half the United Kingdom exports of beef. That is a considerable figure, which is bound to be having a depressing effect on the overall UK beef price. The sooner the market is opened up and the beef is exported, the better for the whole country.

The fears that have been voiced in Scotland and at high political levels for Scotland that Northern Ireland will steal the Scottish market are entirely misplaced. We have always provided a different product to a different market. We would not have the productive capacity to undermine the Scottish market in any case, so the fears are sadly misplaced.

I want to raise with the Minister a problem with which he is familiar—the type of beef that Northern Ireland has been encouraged to produce. As I said in my last speech on the matter in the House, we have been producing a large, heavy animal for the European market. Those animals are still on the farm in Northern Ireland; they are in the pipeline and will be there for some time, because farming practice—and, above all, beef production—cannot be changed in a matter of months. It takes several years to do that.

All the time, we find that the intervention weight is dropping—being forced down—and the farmers are being caught with those large animals. There are only two

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outlets for those animals: into the continental market or into intervention. The farmers have been badly caught. I hope that the Minister will take the matter on board and do something about it. If we could get the weight for intervention up from 370 kg to 390 kg or 400 kg, a large part of the problem would disappear overnight. Unless the problem is addressed, the farmers will go on suffering grievously. This morning, I spoke to one farmer who produces that type of beef exclusively, and he says that he is taking £300 a head less this year, even with intervention, than he was taking last year. Neither he nor anyone else can survive on such figures.

We still have the problem of flagged holdings in Northern Ireland. I understand that efforts are being made in that direction. I hope that we shall have some good news—if not tonight, then in the near future.

6.44 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), and would support any application by Northern Ireland for the certified herd scheme to be applied to the Province. I say that as a representative of a county that would not benefit, at least initially, from the certified herd scheme.

Jealousy is an emotion from which farmers are not wholly immune. They are often sensitive to privileges being granted to another country or another part of the country that they feel that they are denied. It is widely recognised, however, that the grass-fed herds in Northern Ireland and the great dependence of the Province on the export of beef put Northern Ireland into a particular category. I believe that the farmers whom we represent in England would be happy to see a successful outcome to any such application, and I was glad that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister said that he would support an early application that might help the Province.

I have part-ownership of a farm, which is a registered agricultural interest on the Register of Members' Interests. I am not personally much affected by the BSE crisis, but I am certainly affected politically by what has happened over the past 11 months.

I represent one of the biggest concentrations of dairy farmers in the country. That is one reason why Somerset is so well represented in the debate: it is the second biggest dairy county, after Cheshire. My hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) are in their places, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) has already spoken and we even had a five-minute visitation from the leader of the Liberal party, all of which shows that Somerset has been particularly—I will not say uniquely—badly hit by the BSE crisis.

It has been a depressing and, at times, traumatic year for the people whom we represent. Nevertheless, we can begin to see the BSE issue on a broader canvas and assess the wider implications. I do not believe that many of the criticisms levelled by Opposition Members during the debate have been justified. Many of them have been disproportionate to the evidence available.

It was a tremendous blow to British farming when, on 20 March last year, the Government had to announce a crisis, without announcing how to deal with it. We know the reason for that. There was a newspaper leak, which would have been shamelessly exploited by the Opposition to raise a food scare to score a party political point, as we know from their actions since then. That meant that, for an unfortunate period of a few weeks, farmers did not know how the crisis was to be addressed. When it became clear that large numbers of animals faced slaughter, the Department was administratively overwhelmed. That point was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater.

Agriculture is one of the smaller Whitehall Departments, and it was inevitable that it could not cope initially with the huge task before it. A further difficulty, which has been alluded to in the debate, is that the laudable aim of making science our guide overlooked the fact that scientific opinion on the issue was shifting. We still do not know the precise connection between the animal and the human forms of the disease, and we may only estimate the real risks to humans. Those points were made powerfully in an earlier contribution by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), who explained that science and the politicians could not provide the certainty and the assurances that the rather hysterical press were seeking.

Against that background, it is hardly surprising that it proved extremely difficult to devise a comprehensive scheme to deal conclusively with the problem. I took up many of the issues on behalf of my farming constituents, and I occasionally criticised Ministers and their decisions about the direction and pace of the recovery programme. I hope that I also used the expertise of local farmers to improve procedures nationally.

What is the balance sheet 11 months later? It was never going to be easy to kill more than 1 million cattle in the space of a few months and dispose of the carcases safely. Technically, commercially and administratively, it was a colossal undertaking without precedent in farming history. The only other big crisis that I faced as a Member of Parliament was the introduction of milk quotas in 1984. That measure created a great deal of unhappiness, but it pales into insignificance beside the problems caused by BSE.

My right hon. and learned Friend has naturally attracted some criticism. Agriculture is a highly politicised industry: farmers know that their incomes are affected by Ministers' actions at least as much as by other factors, such as the weather and even their own efforts. The issue was bound to generate great heat and anger, and it was inevitable that much of that anger should be directed personally at my right hon. and learned Friend. As he has remarked on occasion, we are all volunteers in politics. I believe that he showed a great deal of courage, resilience and persistence in supporting farming interests in the Cabinet, and more widely within the Government, and in extracting large sums of money from the Treasury. As an ex-Treasury Minister, I assure hon. Members that that is no mean achievement.

Some £3.5 billion has been committed to the industry as a result of BSE, most of which has come from the British taxpayer. When the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) spoke on behalf of the Opposition, it is significant that he criticised that sum several times. The clear implication is that a future Labour Government would not back their words with the cash and the resources that the scale of the crisis merits.

I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend has assembled a package of measures which, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister promised, has saved the industry. I judge my right hon. and learned Friend on those actions rather than on any supposed deficiency in his telegenic skills. My right hon. and learned Friend has occasionally become impatient—that is his nature. He had my sympathy and support when his impatience was directed at the European Parliament.

We do not know what the final report of that self-serving body will say. However, the European Parliament is motivated almost entirely by a desire to increase its own powers and importance. If the final report is anything like an earlier draft, it may be safely dismissed as vengeful, biased and inaccurate. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will continue to resist any calls to appear before it or the European Court.

I was rather charmed by the innocence of the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). He suggested that, if we were nice to the European institutions, they would be nice to us and that, on that ground alone, a Labour Government would be able to lift the export ban. That is a colossal misunderstanding of the nature of European diplomacy—and I speak with some knowledge derived from an earlier political incarnation.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: I hope that I have interpreted the right hon. Gentleman's remarks correctly. Does he believe that a better negotiating tactic is to put the other side's back up, which is what the Agriculture Minister does every time he goes to Europe?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I support putting a few backs up within the European institutions if we have to. It is a tough old world, and standing up for British interests is not simply a matter of being nice to everyone in the hope that everyone will be nice to us. We have too many scars to believe that is anything more than wishful thinking.

If the European institutions want to repair some of the damage to their reputations, they should move towards lifting the worldwide ban on British beef. I understand that a number of other member states reacted in response to a consumer crisis in those countries. BSE had perhaps a bigger effect on consumer confidence on the continent than in this country. It is one of the oddities of history that arguably the most martial race in Europe—the Germans—have become a race of hypochondriacs. That is a fact with which both they and we must live.

However, it is inexcusable that the apparatus of the European Union should be used to impose a ban not only on the import of beef in European countries but on the import of British beef in third-world countries that might wish to exercise their own judgment and buy it. I have noticed that, in good times, the European Union talks of partnership, co-operation and solidarity: it will certainly lend you an umbrella when it is not raining. However, in difficult times, the EU retreats not into nationalism—I could understand that—but into isolationism, which is the equivalent of taking back the umbrella during a rain shower when one needs to use it. I could recognise national self-interest and perhaps sympathise with it. However, using the apparatus of a supranational institution to impose a wider ban on British beef ensures that we get the worst of all possible worlds. It is particularly baffling in view of the fact that independent and impartial observers generally concede that British beef is the safest in Europe.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that some Opposition Members share his view about the federalism of Europe and its rather waspish attitude to the United Kingdom? However, that is not the issue. The issue is the incompetence of a Government who permitted such people, with their antagonisms, to take advantage of the problem.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I do not accept that point. This Government have ensured that British beef is among the safest in Europe. I am complaining about a European system that not only prevents us from selling beef to other member states—although I do not accept or approve of that position, I can at least understand it—but uses the apparatus of the Union to impose an unjustified worldwide ban in defiance of the scientific evidence.

Mr. Marlow: It is in defiance not just of the science but of European law. That is the problem. European law says that a ban can be placed on British beef or any other British foodstuff if it is a severe hazard to human health. British beef under 30 months with the spinal column removed is not a severe hazard to human health, so the law says that it should not be banned, but political imperatives have superimposed themselves on the whole system of European justice. There is no system of European justice. That is the problem with which we are confronted.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend's views are widely shared among farmers in my constituency, who believe that the bans are driven by commercial and political considerations in defiance of known science.

Farmers also know that, over many years, we have exported a good many animals to other member states. If the animals that we exported were infected with BSE, what happened to them on the continent? Were they mysteriously and magically cured of their BSE when they set foot on German or French soil? They are certainly not showing up in the official statistics.

We also know that British slaughterhouse procedures are now more rigorous and safe than most of those on the continent. British farmers are understandably cynical about the way in which their livelihoods are manipulated by some continental institutions. I ask the hon. Member for Carmarthen, who spoke in favour of the European Parliament and other institutions, to bear that in mind before he speaks about this again.

I very much regret that, despite the scientific evidence, it appears that we will have to undertake a further selective cull, but I defer to my right hon. and learned Friend's judgment on its importance if we are to have any chance of lifting the ban. The selective or accelerated cull is supported by the NFU and most of the farmers I represent, but I issue a cautionary warning: it will be extremely difficult to implement in practice.

From now on, the Ministry will have to select animals that have not reached the end of their useful lives, and in a dairy herd that breeds its own replacements it will be very difficult to persuade a farmer to give up a productive

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animal that he strongly believes to be entirely healthy simply to be part of a selective cull, which, on all the available evidence, is unnecessary.

In any case, we all know that the animals would, at the end of their useful lives, be caught by the existing cull of over-30-months-old beasts. There will be severe practical difficulties. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to deal sympathetically with the farmers concerned, because they have co-operated well so far in an extremely difficult matter. It has affected their livelihoods and the lives of their animals, which they regard not as simply milk-producing or beef-producing machines but animals that they look after every day of their lives.

I return to the terms of the motion. I have explained how my right hon. and learned Friend retains my full confidence. Over the year, both major Opposition parties have never really shown the slightest understanding of the needs of rural Britain. That is exemplified in the county that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) and I represent by the crass activities of Liberal Democrat-led Somerset county council, which spent many hundreds of thousands of pounds in a completely fruitless attempt to ban hunting on a narrow strip of common land on the Quantocks, thereby annoying all the farmers in my constituency, wasting a great deal of ratepayers' money and not even succeeding in the ban. All they have done during the past few years is to make many lawyers very rich. To my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton and me, that shows the underlying attitude of the Liberal Democrats to the needs of rural Britain, which has been brought out in today's debate.

The comments of Labour Front Benchers have exacerbated the BSE crisis throughout. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East made a great deal of noise, but his speech was almost entirely empty. When farmers face a choice at the forthcoming general election, they will see, if only from this debate, that the Labour party is willing to turn an agricultural crisis to party advantage. Farmers will have been shown that Labour would—as they already know—sacrifice them to other interests.

My right hon. and learned Friend—the subject, perhaps, of today's debate—will not only survive the debate but emerge from it stronger.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have to inform the House that Madam Speaker has placed a limit of 10 minutes on speeches made between 7 pm and 9 pm.

7.5 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): There is something amazingly pompous about Tory Members of Parliament saying that Opposition Members, from whatever party, do not know anything about rural affairs and therefore should not be entitled to speak on them, which was the burden of much of what the right hon. Members for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and for Bridgwater (Mr. King) said. By the same token, we shall expect Conservative Members to keep quiet on urban affairs in future. I represent a rural constituency.

I remind Conservative Members, including the right hon. Member for Bridgwater, that all our constituents eat food. The Government and Conservative Members ignore that fact at their peril.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) referred to farmers and consumers as opposing groups. He said that Labour was trying to be friends with farmers and consumers, but they are not opposing groups; they represent a locked-together interest. I am sure that farmers understand that, even if Conservative Members do not.

It is a privilege to speak in a debate with the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), who is a novelist, as well as being a politician. I am writing a political novel, although I am sure that it will not be of quite the same quality as his. This is its scenario. It is March 1996 and the French Minister for Health announces in the French Parliament that a possible new variant of CJD has been discovered, probably linked to BSE. Public outcry follows in France and sales of beef go into free fall.

In the United Kingdom, of course, the panic is held in check by the Conservative Government's famous sangfroid. The Prime Minister announces that we must support our French partners by importing their beef. The right hon. Member for Wokingham, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and others from the Back Benches warn the European Commission not to act against exports of French beef to Britain. The Secretary of State for the Environment is filmed force feeding his family with French beefburgers, and early-day motions are tabled asking the House of Commons catering department to include steak tartare made from French beef on all menus.

This little fantasy results from my contemplating what the Conservative Government's reaction would be to any EC country with the same record on BSE as theirs. It would be little short of hysteria. However, in their desperate search for someone else to blame—having tried my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)—they latched on to Europe and roped in their Europhobe Back Benchers to fuel a clear attempt to divert the British press and the public from the fact that this catastrophe began, blossomed and climaxed under the Tory Government, and that the bulk of the bills will probably be paid by the next Labour Government.

So pervasive has the "blame stinking Europe" strategy become, that, when it visited Britain last year, the Minister refused to meet the temporary committee set up by the Commission to seek a solution to the deadlock. For that crass rudeness alone, he should be sacked. The Select Committee on Agriculture met members of the committee. Its Chairman is present, and I am sure that he will confirm that we were not summoned. Knowing him, I am sure that had he been summoned he would not have attended. The temporary committee was positive and it expressed its desire to be constructive. The United Kingdom's representatives on it were Sir Henry Plumb and Phillip Whitehead, who are hardly unsympathetic to the British cause.

Even if we leave aside the political complacency of the 1980s and early 1990s, it is clear that from last March onwards the Tory Government and Tory Back Benchers failed to understand or to respond to public unease. Their response has been to leap unquestioningly to the defence of the producer, the processor and the retailer. In the manic and absurd way in which they have done that, they have probably achieved the reverse of what they intended, and have further damaged the beef industry.

There is something particularly insidious about the feeling that one's food may be contaminated. That feeling is compounded into fear when one learns that the prion

involved in BSE is extremely hard to destroy, and it becomes panic when the horrible finality of CJD is publicised. The Government's insistence on countering those fears simply by repeating the fact that the risk is low verges on the irrelevant. For whoever gets CJD, the risk is 100 per cent. The Government conjure up other risks, such as smoking or driving. That is also irrelevant: those risks are known and well understood, however foolish it may be to ignore them.

When we discovered that beef products appear in foods as varied as sweets, chicken soup, lamb mince and baby food, we were right to be alarmed, and so were the public. What ordinary consumers required was tough, quick action—over-drastic perhaps, and over-cautious perhaps—and full, honest information. What they got was a long, blustering denial of their fears, and that is what they are still getting.

Over and again, the Government repeat the same mantra—we heard it again a moment ago. We are told that British beef is the best in the world: that is a fact, it is in the Bible somewhere. We are told that British beef is the safest in Europe and, no doubt, in the universe. Tory Back Benchers have told us that their visiting grandchildren would be fed British beef, whether they wanted it or not, and that they would increase their own beef consumption. Anyone who asks questions about BSE is automatically branded unpatriotic and is accused of doing Britain down. One is reminded of the famous phrase,

"The louder he talked of his honour, the faster we counted our spoons."

That attitude would be silly if it were not so tragic for the beef industry, and so contemptuous of the consumer. Furthermore, the Government have searched for someone else to blame: it was the Labour party, but today it is the Liberal Democrats. Tory Members on the joint Committee that met after the 20 March announcement heaped scorn on the press for scaremongering, but did not at any point that I can discover, having just read the report again, consider what had provoked those scares and whether they were justified. Predictably, we have ended up with two extreme attitudes facing each other and baying across the void.

Almost everything that the Government have done has served to undermine trust. The public's mistrust is no longer confined to beef, but is spreading insidiously to other foods, particularly meats. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has come to be seen as the Ministry for producers, not for consumers. The creation of an independent food standards agency has become not just a desirable project, but an absolute necessity for the future of the food industry. Slaughtered cattle are piled up in their thousands in storage, awaiting destruction. No one can be certain that at least some of them will not find their way into food chains or into landfill.

Simple, common-sense questions go unanswered, such as those about the residues of the slaughtering and deboning process being washed into drains. When I asked the Chief Veterinary Officer, Mr. Meldrum, about maternal transmission, he said:

"We have no evidence of maternal transmission. . . if it is occurring it is at a rate of less than five per cent."

What sort of reassurance was that? Questions have been asked about whether the contamination of pasture is a danger. The answer given in the same report was that pasture has never been and never will be tested. Questions have been asked about the relatively high incidence of CJD in dairy farmers—across Europe, admittedly—and the answer has been that the numbers are not significant.

Through all this, the Minister has repeated over and again that he is following the science. That is reasonable enough, but important caveats have been included this evening. He does not tell us that the Ministry chooses which science to follow. Any scientist who asks an awkward question or poses an alternative view is automatically dismissed as barmy.

The expansion of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee to include public health experts, and the arrival in the chair of Professor Pattison, undoubtedly improved the position last year with regard to public information.

7.15 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston–super–Mare): I shall begin by apologising to the House for having to be absent for a few minutes, but the progress of Government business is such that it was necessary to take action on tomorrow's rather unpleasant experience, and we shall have to deal with that when it happens.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), but I fear that I may disappoint him about who to blame for what has taken place. Not enough has been said about the disastrous effect on this whole affair of the leak that appeared in the *Daily Mirror* on 19 March. It is unreasonable to ask Ministers to deal with such an important and vital crisis at the drop of a hat. A day or two's thought should have been given to how the case should have been presented. Some of the questions that were asked would have been asked behind the scenes and answers would have been available.

We seem to accept that putting in the public domain documents that have been taken—I prefer to use the word "stolen"—is good for the British public, and that by keeping them secret we are harming some unknown freedom. I doubt whether many countries would have deliberately rushed to publish such bad news or to put Ministers so severely on the spot.

The statement that was made nearly 12 months ago concerned just 10 cases that gave rise to some suspicion of a link between BSE and CJD. That link has not yet been proven. The good news is that that figure of 10 has risen to only 14 or 15, which is good evidence that there may not be a serious epidemic. Everyone is nervous about and frightened of an epidemic. When one considers that 11 or 12 people are killed on the roads every day, it puts this crisis in a different perspective. I wonder what would happen if we spent £3.5 billion on our road system.

The hon. Members for Peckham (Ms Harman) and for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) spent some time denying any responsibility for the panic that struck the nation when the announcement was made. Their actions at the time were grossly unhelpful. This situation is totally unprecedented. It is not in the best interests of the British nation for everyone to run around being critical. I do not have direct quotes in front of me, but those who were present will remember clearly the inferences that were drawn, the fear that was generated and the petrol that was poured on the fire by Opposition Front Benchers.

What happened? The position had been perfectly well understood in Europe since 1988. When the first evidence came to light, we went straight to the European veterinary

[Sir Jerry Wiggin]

and scientific committee. It accepted the science and never questioned it until 12 months ago when, inexcusably and unforgivably but carried along by public opinion and press and media panic, one after another Ministers in Germany, France and Italy suddenly starting to talk about banning British beef. Before we knew it, we were all on a roller coaster but, ironically, their own industries were damaged even more than ours. That is the current position.

We have heard much about promises and deals. Because the countries that imposed the ban acted illegally and because there is no machinery in place to deal with such a situation, we are at the mercy of the Europeans who have to say when and under what conditions they will lift the ban. It is not up to us. Those countries said that they would like us to do six things. We have done five and are about to do the sixth; we shall then be in a position to say that they must honour the spirit of the Florence agreement, which was no more than that—I do not think that hon. Members who have said that there was a condition attached and that there would definitely be reciprocal action have quite realised the true situation.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East could find little to criticise very strongly but mentioned sampling in slaughterhouses. I shall say a brief word about that because the issue was put to us when we first examined the problem—I think that the hon. Members for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) and for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who are both sitting on the Opposition Front Bench at the moment, were probably on the Select Committee on Agriculture at the time.

The proportion of cattle likely to be showing any clinical signs of BSE at any one time is less than 0.3 per cent. To have to dissect and inspect the brains of some 300 cattle to find one infected brain is simply not a good use of research resources, and Darrell said as much. I do not think that there is much point in our pursuing that line of thought.

We have successfully slaughtered 1.1 million cattle in under 12 months. Bearing in mind that the recommendation for that slaughter came within a few weeks—days, in fact—of the original announcement, the response has been pretty remarkable. I know that last summer there were criticisms and a feeling of desperation that the necessary facilities were not available, the cattle were backing up on the farms and so on, but the problems have been dealt with and we are proceeding correctly.

I do not believe for one second that the Government could have got a selective cull through the House last August. The absolutely firm view of the farming community was that the original over-30-months cull had to be completed first and that we could then consider the implications of a selective cull.

I deal briefly with the situation in Northern Ireland. I have very great sympathy for farmers in Northern Ireland for two reasons. First, there is evidence that grass-fed cattle that have not consumed animal protein are, as near as it is possible to say, 100 per cent. free from BSE. The same applies to a number of other beef producers in Scotland, Wales and the west country. There are also isolated examples all over the country of farmers who have never used animal protein in the feed. One dairy farmer in my constituency has always made up his own feedstuffs using fishmeal. He has never had a case of BSE on his farm but he happens to be a dairy farmer. I can see a legitimate case for treating such farmers differently.

The Ulster situation is better than most because Ulster has for many years had a cattle-tracing system. We recommended way back in 1990 that the whole country should have that system. It provides a second reason for Ulster to suggest that it should perhaps be put at the head of the queue for the ban being lifted.

As I understand it, the complaint at the moment is that the Government are not seeking to start negotiations and put Northern Ireland at the head of the queue. I do not know whether that is so, but it has certainly not been publicised if it is. I believe that, certainly once the selective cull is under way, there is a very good case for our telling Europe that it must be sensible; we have done everything that was necessary and our special cases should be put to the head of the queue. That is well justifiable. I think it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) who said that farmers are a touch jealous from time to time, but I do not believe that they would be when the case was as good as it is. Incidentally, my right hon. Friend mentioned most of the other hon. Members from Somerset but forgot that Weston-super-Mare is glad to back in Somerset, and has been for the past 12 months.

I am not sure that I would refer to the committee of the European Parliament in the same terms as did the hon. Member for West Lancashire. We were disappointed that the rapporteur, although in this country, could not find the time to be with us. We answered pretty comprehensively the questions put to us.

There is a clear misunderstanding of BSE on the continent—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.25 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I shall follow on from what the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Agriculture, said about the incidence of new variant CJD. He said that he thought that there were about 14 or 15 cases. There could be very many more because of the long incubation period of BSE and CJD. The damage has been done. We could eat untainted beef from now on, but there could still be an epidemic involving millions of people with new variant CJD. In fact, Steven Dealer, a medical microbiologist at Burnley general hospital, puts the figure at up to 35 million with new variant CJD. I am not being alarmist, but that is the extent of the catastrophe that has already befallen us.

Conservative Members talk about the cost. Yes, the BSE blunder has cost us £3.5 billion, but in terms of the health of the nation, the cost is incalculable. Beef is safe only if the controls are in place and working. That is the reality that so many hon. Members seem to have overlooked.

Conservatives have been portraying this debate as the Opposition parties—primarily the Labour party—ganging up quite unfairly on the beleaguered Conservatives. They claim that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has done his best in very difficult circumstances and that the whole debate has been contrived. That is nonsense.

I have here a copy of *Farmers Weekly* from October 1996. The editorial is called "Farmersweekly Opinion" and calls for "Hogg's Head". It states:

"Farm minister Douglas Hogg never fails to disappoint. He is reliable in that regard if nothing else. But even by his own lacklustre standards, Mr. Hogg's speech to the Tory party conference in Bournemouth on Tuesday was a masterpiece of under-achievement."

What he did at Bournemouth he did again today. The same editorial states:

"Carefully skimming over his own contribution to the BSE catastrophe, Mr Hogg apportioned blame equally between Opposition MPs and tabloid press journalists".

The following week, *Farmers Weekly* contained a form to cut out. A journalist wanted farmers across the country to snip it out and send it to the Prime Minister, which they probably did in their thousands. This is what the *Farmers Weekly* was advising farmers to sign:

"Dear Prime Minister,

We believe that:

Farm Minister Douglas Hogg has forfeited the confidence of the farming industry. He should be replaced by someone with the stature to defend British interests abroad and to devise and implement successful policies at home to lead us out of the BSE crisis."

We have not manufactured the issue; the Agriculture Minister has been a complete, unmitigated disaster.

Year zero for BSE was not 1996, although Conservative Members seem to suggest that the ground trembled under our feet on 20 March 1996 and nothing had occurred before then. BSE was identified a decade before that date, and the specified bovine offal ban was introduced in November 1989. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) and other hon. Members have said, that ban was never adequately policed. That is why our colleagues in continental Europe became so aerated.

Another reason why our continental colleagues became aerated is that, after we banned contaminated feed in Britain, we were shipping it to continental Europe. We were telling them, "You shouldn't feed it to bovine animals, but you can feed it to your pigs or to your poultry." We did not label the sacks of feed, so the French farmers, for example, who received them did not know whether it could be fed to their cattle, pigs or poultry. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—who is not in the Chamber—seemed to suggest that the European Commission failed in its duty by not stopping us sending that poisonous feed to continental Europe.

The matter goes beyond contaminated feed, although such feed was on our farms until 1 August 1996—only a few months ago—when it became illegal for British farmers to have it on their holdings. There were also manifest failures in slaughterhouses. As late as September 1995, 48 per cent. of slaughterhouses were not complying with specified offal controls. In March 1996—the month when the matter broke open, and storms raged—4 per cent. of our slaughterhouses were still not adhering to the specified bovine offal ban that would render our beef safe to eat. It is laughable that Conservative Members should blow hot and cold about Labour Members trying to whip up feelings and fright among the public.

On 16 December 1996, I received a letter from the Agriculture Minister on the selective cull, about which we have heard so much in this debate. In it, he told all hon. Members that

"The rules . . . are being enforced with great rigour."

The reality is that the rules were not enforced with great rigour before then. He went on to say:

"More than 450 additional inspectors have been taken on"

to police slaughterhouses.

In his letter, the Agriculture Minister did not say—no Conservative Member has ever had the guts to say it—that the number of authorised meat hygiene inspectors fell by 34 per cent. in the five years before the Meat Hygiene Service was established, in 1995. The number was cut from 1,026 to 677. If we add the 400 new inspectors who the Government trumpeted last December, the number of meat inspectors now is the same as it was in 1990. Between 1990 and 1995, there was also a 17 per cent. decrease in the number of environmental health officers—who also had some responsibility before the Meat Hygiene Service was established. Those figures are from the Library. The number of student environmental health officers decreased by 18 per cent.

A few weeks ago, the Minister told the House that he had established a "food supremo", who will ensure that the food that we eat is safe, but the Conservative party has been presiding over a disastrous decline in the number of people whose job is to ensure that the food that we eat is safe. What has happened in that period? Deaths from food poisoning have doubled; there were 90 deaths in 1990, and 202 in 1995. In that period, we have had to deal with listeria, salmonella, E. coli and—crowning it all—the disaster of BSE.

I think that it is quite right that we should bring the matter to public attention. The facts speak for themselves. The Conservative party has forfeited the respect of the House and the respect of the nation.

7.34 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (West Gloucestershire): If ever I heard a speech in which a Labour Member has cried for the return of the nanny state, the speech of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) was it. It is a cry for ever more regulation and ever more cost. I only hope that he cleared that speech with the shadow Chancellor.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Labour party has demonstrated in this debate that it cares nothing for farmers and seeks only to crank up fear in consumers' minds. As for quoting *Farmers Weekly* editorials, I remember very well when the House was attempting to introduce milk quotas—which are now one of dairy farmers' most valuable assets—and farmers and *Farmers Weekly* objected. Quoting back issues of *Farmers Weekly* does not cut much ice on the Conservative Benches.

Echoing in a sense what my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) said about the heavy representation of Somerset in the House, I do not want hon. Members to think that I am speaking only for myself. As neither my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) nor my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) is eligible to speak in the debate because of their duties, I am also voicing their opinions, and therefore represent 75 per cent. of Gloucestershire Members of Parliament.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Not for much longer.

Mr. Marland: Dream on. I am happy for the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) to dream on and to think of better things, but he will be very disappointed.

[Mr. Marland]

BSE is undoubtedly the biggest crisis that has ever hit the UK food industry. More people and sectors in the industry have been involved in this crisis than in any previous one, and hindsight is a very cheap commodity. We are sick to death of carping by the Labour and Liberal parties about what should have been done, and of hearing about how much better they might have handled the situation—with the benefit of hindsight. Hindsight always was and always will be a cheap commodity.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Agriculture Minister—who has been masterminding the difficulties—has always, and quite rightly, taken the best available scientific advice. He appointed the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, under Professor Pattison, and has taken its advice. As other hon. Members have said, imagine the uproar in the House if a Minister had attempted to act on his own gut feeling rather than on the best available scientific advice.

There is no doubt that the demand for slaughtering under the 30-months scheme far exceeded any possible forecast. There is also no doubt that, to some extent, farmers regarded the scheme as an opportunity to upgrade their herds, and they took advantage of it. I do not cast one iota of blame on them for that. However, once it was realised that a backlog was building up and that farmers were facing difficulties keeping their cattle, what did my right hon. and learned Friend the Agriculture Minister do? He did not turn his back on farmers, but offered them payment in advance for cattle that were to be slaughtered.

I accept that there was some difficulty getting cattle to slaughterhouses on time because such a colossal number of animals were being killed. As other hon. Members have said, 1.25 million cattle have been killed under the scheme. Of course there were difficulties getting all those cattle to slaughterhouses on time.

I maintain close contacts with Gloucester market, as have my hon. Friends from Gloucestershire, and we were disturbed to hear about the difficulties faced by many farmers there. To be fair to Mike Credland, the manager of the market, he did the very best that he could and speeded the animals to the slaughter as quickly as he could without showing fear or favour to anyone.

Another difficulty that was slowing down the slaughter was the lack of rendering capacity. My right hon. and learned Friend did not sit back and do nothing about that either. He sought to take advantage of and arrange a lot of extra cold storage throughout the country so that we could speed up the slaughter of cattle, and due credit should be given to him for taking that initiative. Such measures take time, are not easy to arrange and cost money, but my right hon. and learned Friend got on with the job and concluded the over-30-months scheme considerably in advance of what had been expected.

Soon, we will have fulfilled six of the six conditions laid down by the Florence summit in order that the European ban on the export of British beef may be lifted. I hope that, once the cattle have been identified and the selective slaughter has gone ahead, we shall manage to persuade our European partners to look seriously at the possibility of lifting the ban. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, it is perfectly fair and reasonable that we should start in Ulster because of the special circumstances relating to Northern Ireland. I shall not go over them all again, but it would be a gesture of good will on behalf of our European partners if they embraced that suggestion and allowed the export of beef from Northern Ireland.

The Labour party is using this debate to kick British farmers in the teeth. Like other hon. Members, I have been talking to farmers over the weekend. I had a number of telephone calls from Gloucestershire farmers who, as a result of this debate, want to stick pins into the Opposition agriculture spokesman for causing waves and making difficulties for them just when things were beginning to settle down again. The Labour party is exploiting BSE for its own ends by creating unfavourable publicity about the disease.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may be interested to know that a little while ago, McDonald's, the hamburger people, came to see members of the Back Bench committee. We have had two or three meetings with them during this period and, as usual, we were trying to press them to reintroduce British beef to their restaurants. They said that they were looking favourably at the matter but that their only concern was unfavourable media coverage of BSE and British beef.

Opposition spokesmen are guilty of generating further unfavourable publicity for British beef. We should hang that round their necks and bury them in the vote at 10 o'clock.

7.41 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate, however briefly.

As the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said, the effect of the BSE crisis in Northern Ireland has been much more dramatic than in Great Britain. Not only have the farming community, the downstream industries, their employees and the other manufacturing processes been dramatically affected; the whole economy has been subjected to the possibility of disaster because beef is a base industry.

We had hoped that the Florence agreement last June would be quickly implemented. The practical farmers of Northern Ireland had no idea that it could be renegotiated. At the beginning, we knew that it was the base on which the door could be opened, so we were extremely disappointed when, on 19 September, the Government decided not to proceed with the selective cull. That bad decision has held us back for 11 months—from March to February.

Some parts of the beef industry in Northern Ireland depend on intervention. I do not want to rehearse the beneficial attributes of the Northern Ireland beef industry because they have already been rehearsed well this evening and on previous occasions. Northern Ireland farmers do not seek privilege in this matter; they simply seek an acknowledgement of the circumstances—traceability, and so on—and that, once the new submission is agreed, further selective culls will take only three weeks to complete. Shortly after the Government submit their terms to Brussels, therefore, Northern Ireland would be ready to take advantage of whatever is agreed.

In the Northern Ireland Committee, which discussed BSE last week, the Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Denton of Wakefield, and her heads of Department were

somewhat ambivalent, although not maliciously so, when they heard that we had not had a clear message on two fronts. First, when the Government submit their detailed response, there will be a further period in which to negotiate that response. That has worried farmers in Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole. We were under the impression that the submission would open the door immediately, so what is this talk about further negotiation of the terms?

Secondly, the point about Northern Ireland's unique position is not that Northern Ireland should be accorded privilege but that it should, as has already been said, be used as the key by which to unlock the ban imposed on us in Europe and more widely. We know from our contacts in Europe—I am sure that this view will be supported by the other Northern Ireland Members here this evening—that Commissioner Fischler and the chairman of the EU agriculture committee are receptive to the suggestion that that is the means by which the ban can be unlocked.

There is, however, one major proviso, which is why the hon. Member for East Londonderry, the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and I asked the Minister when he was at the Dispatch Box earlier to be absolutely explicit. I must say again that I did not get a definite answer on whether the Commission will require the Government specifically to ask for the Northern Ireland option to be implemented. Unless the Government ask, it will not be in the reckoning. That is the answer that the three of us were trying to elicit from the Minister in his "defence", if I may call it that, this evening, but no clear answer came through to me.

I hope that the Minister who responds to the debate will deal with that point specifically. We require almost a "yes or no" answer, but that might be too much to expect in a parliamentary debate. It would, however, be beneficial. It is the key to where the Northern Ireland farming industry is going; it is also the key by which the entire UK beef industry can have access to European and world markets once again.

In the meantime—I do not yet know what time frame we are in—I wish to draw the House's attention to one or two other matters. The agriculture community was heartened and gladdened by the announcement in October at the Agriculture Council meeting of £52 million to aid the industry. Some £9.25 million of that relates to Northern Ireland. Strangely, that announcement had a mixed reception in Northern Ireland, not because of the amount but because of the proposed distribution. It was felt that more attention should have been paid to beasts that went through the slaughter programme after 5 August last year. Owners of those beasts suffered from the cut in prices, delivered in spite of promises made as early as April that the price then pertaining would continue throughout the slaughter programme.

The flagged herd seems not to have had the attention that it should have had in the distribution of that £9.25 million. It is a small section of the industry, representing only 3 or 4 per cent., but it is in a dead end and needs additional sustenance to keep it alive over the winter.

My second point on continuing support relates to the intervention contract mentioned by the hon. Member for East Londonderry. I have two points to make about that. Northern Irish beef producers are inordinately dependent on the intervention price. The industry was always geared to producing a heavy beast. The intervention weight limits have been restricted from 390 kg to 370 kg. I understand that there are proposals to reduce it to as low as 360 kg next month, and eventually down to 340 kg. The situation is disastrous for the type of animal that has been produced on Northern Ireland's farms. That cannot be turned round in one season or five. I should like the Minister to take on board that point about alleviation.

The second point on intervention relates to price reporting. Price reporting is across the board of all prices. Logically, intervention price reporting should reflect only the intervention prices, not the lower downmarket prices of other animals not in intervention.

To summarise, we need the lifting of the ban as a first point of entry—someone said the first ship in the convoy. We also need an adjustment of the compensation distribution and an early increase in the permissible intervention weight.

7.51 pm

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): I open with a brief remark to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). On these occasions, he is very much the lone ranger. He holds up the Liberal cause to the best of his ability. I ask him to go out, be the lone ranger and deal with the leaders of councils, in the west country in particular, who imposed a ban on beef long before there was a European ban. He needs to crack a whip or use a pistol on them. Will he start with the leader of Dorset county council? That would be extremely helpful.

One remark by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) tonight found an echo with many hon. Members. He said what a pity it was that we did not have co-operation, and that, rather than opposing, the Opposition had not come forward at a time of crisis with an offer of working together to find a solution. That has been done before. During the foot and mouth outbreak in the 1960s, the Conservative Opposition went to the then Minister of Agriculture and said, "How can we help? Let's go together on this."

If the Opposition had come to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister at the start of this dreadful crisis and said that they wanted to work with him, he would have welcomed them on board, and they would have been part of the crisis committee that has done so much over the past 11 or 12 months to get the crisis under control. It is now under control. The way in which the Labour party has brought the issue forward tonight is obscene.

I have been proud to represent West Dorset for the past 23 years. This past year has been the proudest, because I have seen the fortitude of my farmers at a time of great crisis for them and their industry. Dorset was, and still is, the county hardest hit by BSE, and West Dorset has been in the eye of the storm throughout. We have all known about BSE for many years, but the reality is that farmers have had to live with the problem, waking up to confront it every morning. When it finally burst open in March, what happened? It was leaked by the *Daily Mirror* and played up by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). The precipitate problem need not have been built up into a crisis.

The European member states reacted in the same way as the Labour party, going for short-term political gain. They have inflicted a wound on themselves, just as the Labour party will tonight.

[Sir Jim Spicer]

Last Thursday, we saw the start of the new Labour weekend spin. The Leader of the Opposition got up and focused on BSE, saying that spending £3 billion on BSE was a disgraceful waste of money. I have one or two questions for him and others in his team. They are important questions to which farmers in my constituency would like answers. Would he have initiated the 30-month cull and slaughtered more than 1 million animals? That task was carried out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister and all those in his team. They carried out that crisis operation to the best of their ability, with the support of the farming community and everyone else.

Would Labour have given such positive support to our farming community? Would they have completed that 30-month cull successfully in the first week of December, and then, at the behest of the NFU—I have said this several times to the hon. Member for North Cornwall—embarked on the accelerated cull, as the Government have done? That would not have been authorised if the farming community had not been fully behind it.

Does the Labour team understand that my farmers in West Dorset welcome the Government's measured approach and the way in which they are dealing with the selective cull? There will be full discussion between farmers and officials before the cull. Even after that, farmers will have some say in when their cattle will be disposed of, so that it can fit in with their proper business plan.

Those on the Labour Front Bench do not understand any of that. They do not understand the countryside—Labour is not a countryside party.

Mr. Morley *rose—*

Sir Jim Spicer: I have only 10 minutes, and I have already used six.

In total contrast is the approach of our team. I remember with great pride 8 October last year in Bournemouth, when nine members of the NFU, led by Sir David Naish, with the support of Ben Gill, my county chairman John Hoskin and representatives from Wales—sadly, there were no representatives from Scotland and Ulster—came to see the Prime Minister. We had a full and frank exchange of views. We know that of course mistakes are made in a crisis of this sort. I am the first to admit that, and so is my right hon. and learned Friend. We are not all paragons, like Opposition Members.

I remember the summing-up by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the end of that two-hour meeting. He said:

> "I will do all in my power to see that this iniquitous ban is lifted, but whatever happens in that respect, my main aim and that of my Government will be to ensure that when BSE is finally eradicated, British agriculture will be in good heart and in a position to take on all comers."

That pledge carries us through the life of the next Conservative Government.

Sadly, I shall not be here to see that Government in action, but I know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister, with all his team, will live up to that pledge. In the past year, they have carried a burden that few in the House or outside can understand. I thank them for all they have done, and I thank those in our party who have given them such splendid and sterling support during a crisis year for agriculture.

7.59 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South–West): This debate has been called not long after the annual conference of the National Farmers Union, where the bungling record of the Minister of Agriculture yet again received its annual drubbing. To farmers in my constituency and elsewhere, after nearly two years as Agriculture Minister, Mr. Hogg has been an unquestioned failure. As we have heard, Government bungling has cost the taxpayer £3.5 billion, which is equivalent to 2p on income tax. To be completely fair to the Minister, he inherited the catalogue of errors that have been made since 1986. If there was ever anything worthy of a motion of censure, this issue is it.

It pains me that, after years of waiting for the Government to sort out the beef mess, we are still waiting. It seems that all along, as I have said before, Mr. Hogg's only method for solving the beef mess has been to recruit Old Father Time and take the best scientific advice—where the definition of "best" is what is best for the Government at the time. I am angry that Welsh, Irish, Scottish and English farmers still have no idea when things will change. No wonder Mr. Hogg was voted the 1996 loser of the year in *The Guardian*, beating off strong competition from his colleagues. Incompetence has been raised to the level of an art by his Government.

Farmers and consumers alike have been given little indication of Government policy and when to expect things to change for the better. It is a sad joke that is getting sadder. The recent edition of *New Ground*, the journal of the Socialist, Environment and Resources Association made the observation:

> "The Tory leadership seems to think that if it closes its eyes and hides in bed, the world and its problems will disappear.
>
> Unfortunately for the Prime Minister, the world is standing around looking at a pathetic lump crouching under the blankets of political incompetence."

That recent critical assessment is sadly even more true of the Minister's miserable performance, which has been abysmal.

Admittedly, the matter has not been helped by the Prime Minister's ludicrous antics to pacify his Euro-sceptics, but I fear that even my pet cat could have done a better and more competent job—and still could, unless he came down with feline spongiform encephalopathy and was no longer able to travel. That point may be sarcastic, but I made it because in my anger I am reminded that people have died as a result of the Government's bungling.

Why did the Government not introduce random testing? Why did they not introduce tagging sooner? Why did not Mr. Hogg listen when the Opposition and farmers called for immediate action to certify herds? The Opposition have constantly suggested the certification of herds since the late 1980s, yet the Ministry of Agriculture is only just looking at it now. If it had acted when we asked, there would have been no need for the extra cull of the selective slaughter scheme.

Apart from the Tory-inflicted environmental and economic disaster, I see from the selective slaughter programme that the Government cannot even organise the clear-up operation of their own mess. My farmers tell me

that there are still inconsistencies and problems with the scheme all over the place, including compensation, the definition of a herd, and the additional chaos of the inconsistency of figures on exactly how many cattle are to be slaughtered. It seems that the yo-yo-ing of the figure is dependent on how Mr. Hogg is feeling that morning, which is pathetic and deeply damaging to farmers' businesses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman keeps quoting the name of the Minister. If he is, that is all right, but if he is referring to him, I am sure that he knows that he should not use the Minister's name.

Mr. Jones: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise.

Refusal to admit mistake after mistake has caused the Government to make even more errors—wasting billions of pounds and leaving farmers in ruin.

Conservative Members have accused the Opposition of using hindsight. Seven years ago, I demanded in the House that certain measures be taken. I demanded that the Government make Creutzfeld-Jakob disease notifiable; ensure that abattoir practice be examined; ensure that cattle brains be used for no purposes, and be burned and destroyed; stop offal such as brain, spleen and lymph glands being used in any animal foods; stop offal feeding to all animals immediately; create a genuinely independent food standards agency; instigate random testing at abattoirs; prevent the possibility of vertical transmission in cattle by culling calves and infected cattle with full compensation; and increase research on transmission.

That is on the record, in *Hansard*, in 1990. There is no use of hindsight. Years have passed, and despite denial and resistance, one by one many of those demands have, to the Government's embarrassment, been introduced—some too late, others half-heartedly. Amazingly, some are yet to be acted on.

The Opposition, of all political shades, have been proven consistently and entirely correct on BSE. Now, beef is safe, as we have acknowledged several times on the Opposition Benches. We are not trying to create another scare. Many people were, however, exposed to the agent in the 1980s, before the Government made beef safe. They could have made it safe earlier.

In my recent speech on BSE in November, I regaled the House with a joke that farmers tell in north Wales. The only safe meat is hog—but it is spelt H-O-G-G—as it is spineless, brainless, and gutless, and therefore contains no specified offal. There was a time when I thought that that was perhaps a little unkind, but that time has passed. In a previous debate on BSE, the Minister inspired me to coin the phrase, "to MAFF it up". For this debate, I had considered coining the phrase, "to make a Hogg of it", but in view of your reminding me of the conventions of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not do so. "To make a pig's ear" is an acceptable alternative.

In referring to north Wales farmers and their cutting humour, I used the word "spineless". I fear that that may now be said of hon. Members on the Government Benches, especially those who represent farmers but are not likely to vote for the motion. They must know that their farmers have no confidence in the ability of the Minister. Tory Members know too well that their farmers are correct in that assumption, yet they do not have the guts to stand up for what is right, vote down the Minister's performance or speak for their constituents. Their constituents will undoubtedly speak for themselves at the election.

I realise that hon. Members from Northern Ireland, who have in the past backed the Tory line, will not want to feel pushed into voting with the Opposition, but I fail to understand how they can be continuously pushed—or possibly bribed—by the Conservatives into voting with the Government or abstaining, against the wishes of their farmers. Additionally, I doubt very much that any Tory deals that they might squeeze out of them have the backing of reality.

If anyone is under the illusion that Conservative Ministers have any credibility in Europe, they are sadly deluded, and only fooling themselves. Any such Tory deal would be a worthless hand. Europe is waiting for change, and promises by the Conservatives on Europe are meaningless. We are indeed seeing a tired fag end of a Government. They have only weeks to go, with "go" the operative word. British people, like European Ministers, await that day. There is already evidence of tiredness on the Government Front Bench.

As I said at the outset, the Minister's handling of the crisis has cost £3.5 billion. If anything is worthy of a motion of censure, that is it. I ask that Members who represent Northern Ireland recognise the Minister's early replies on putting the case for a separate deal for Northern Ireland for what they were. I believe that they were just dissembling. Northern Ireland Members should do the best for their farmers and vote for the motion. Hon. Members know how their farmers would vote if they had the chance to do so. They should represent their farmers and support the motion.

8.7 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): In the previous debate on this issue, the question of what Europe has promised came up. It was asked whether, if we did all the six things demanded, the ban would be lifted. We have no such promise from Europe—let no one be deceived about that.

I put the case—I am glad to hear from both sides of the House that hon. Members now agree—that Northern Ireland should be treated as a special entity. I suggested that we tested Europe and allowed the accelerated cull to be carried out in Northern Ireland. Then we could say, "Look, here is part of the United Kingdom that has done everything you have asked. Will you raise the ban?" If Europe did not raise the ban then, the House would have known and proved that the United Kingdom could do everything that Europe was asking on the six points, but the ban would not be lifted.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer) gave us some spice tonight. He used to sit with me in Strasbourg, and he knows how the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission work. To hear some pro-Europeans speak tonight, one would think that the European Union was at peace, but the European Parliament will be torn asunder this week. A motion will be tabled to sack the entire Commission for its actions on BSE, and another will be tabled to censure the British Government and the Council of Europe. It is not paradise,

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

or even purgatory, in Europe at the moment: hell itself will be let loose in the European Parliament this week. I am even looking forward to going to Europe, and I do not often do that. Our debate tonight is orderly in comparison with the Babel of languages that we will hear in Europe this week.

I have been told by right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House that Northern Ireland should be treated differently, but only the Minister of Agriculture can start the ball rolling. With the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and Mr. Jim Nicholson, a former Member of the House and now a Member of the European Parliament, I went to see Commissioner Fischler. We asked him what Northern Ireland had to do to get the ban lifted. He told us that Northern Ireland was already far ahead of many parts of Europe, but the Minister of Agriculture had to make an application for Northern Ireland to be treated as a special case. Commissioner Fischler told us what happened in Germany when it had an outbreak of swine fever. Regions of Germany were removed from the scheme because they were free of the disease, and he added that there was no reason why that could not be done for Northern Ireland.

We also went to see the President of the Council of Ministers, when Ireland held the presidency. He said that he would be prepared to back an application for Northern Ireland to be treated as a special case. I also received a letter from a friend of the German Minister of Agriculture, which I took with me when I went to see the Prime Minister with the hon. Member for Foyle. The letter said that the German Minister of Agriculture would look favourably on any application to treat Northern Ireland differently.

Earlier today in the House, I asked the Minister of Agriculture the question put to me by the Ulster Farmers Union. I asked him whether, when all the requirements of the Florence agreement had been met, he would formally request that the export ban be lifted for Northern Ireland. I did not get an answer to that question. The Minister said that he would make a general application, which I welcome, but he did not answer my question. We in Northern Ireland do not want to thumb our nose at any other part of the United Kingdom. We want to be the key: we want to lead the way in the lifting of the ban.

The Commissioner is on our side, as is the former President of the Council of Ministers, and the German Agriculture Minister would favour an application. Why will the Government not agree to make the application? They should say tonight that they will. This is not the first time I have asked the question, and it will not be the last, but I fear that it will not be answered tonight.

Our beef industry faces extinction. The situation in Northern Ireland is worse than anywhere else, because we need an export market: without it we perish. Those are not my words, but those of the Ulster Farmers' Union. As everyone knows, I do not share its politics, but it wrote to me to say:

"The lack of progress made by the Government on the implementation of this agreement has been inexcusable. In the meantime, the Northern Irish beef industry remains very heavily dependent on the EU's Beef Intervention Scheme as a market for our beef and, to add insult to injury"—

the UFU is usually very polite—

"despite our lack of alternative markets, the access to this scheme is continually being restricted. While we remain so dependent on European political decisions, our beef industry faces extinction."

I ask the Government to think again; I hope that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will say tonight that the Government have decided to make an application to treat Northern Ireland as a special case.

8.15 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I support the motion. My only disagreement is that it should include the name of the Secretary of State for Scotland. I tabled an amendment to that effect, but it was not selected. The Secretary of State for Scotland is as culpable as, if not more culpable than, the Minister of Agriculture.

I shall make some particular points about Scotland and BSE. The Government's position on BSE is totally untenable. First, the Government denied that there was a problem with BSE, despite the hundreds of thousands of cases. I remember when the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), was a junior Minister of State for Agriculture. Whenever hon. Members mentioned BSE, he greeted them with the same logic behind his response to beggars on the streets of London. He roared at them and claimed that they were undermining the industry.

Next, the Government panicked. Almost a year ago, when the consequences of BSE for human health became known, the Minister of Agriculture panicked. I remember the "On the Record" interview when the Minister speculated about the total slaughter of the entire British beef herd. Then the Government blustered and tried to blame someone else. When the beef ban was imposed, the Secretary of State for Scotland hauled down the European flag, the beef war was declared, and the Prime Minister talked of beef in our times.

After the Florence agreement, the Government prevaricated. The Prime Minister gave us a timetable, but he would not embark on the action that was needed to meet it. The November deadline came and went, and we still had no progress. Now we have total immobility from the Government on the problem of BSE.

I visited Brussels a few weeks ago and spoke to Commission officials. Their message was clear: we are not about to have a breakthrough on BSE. If anything, we are further back than we were six months ago. The hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) was right to say that there was a time last summer when key European figures had lined up behind a zonal approach to the problem, starting with Northern Ireland and Scotland. However, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the politics in Europe have now changed and the Commission is under attack for being too lenient on the British beef industry.

Instead of seizing that window of opportunity and taking the offers on the table last year, the attitude of the Minister—and, worse still, the Secretary of State for Scotland—was to have nothing to do with the only positive proposals that were coming forward. That window of opportunity occurred when Commissioner Fischler said in *The Herald* on 22 May last year that he favoured a zonal approach to the problem. The failure of the Government to make progress when progress could have been made is one of the indictments hanging over them this evening.

The Scottish beef industry has enormous strengths. We have a quality assurance scheme, a low rate of BSE and a reputation for quality meat that is known across Europe. Many producers in my constituency and my area of

Scotland tell me that much of their market could be restored if the ban were lifted, such is the quality and reputation of Scottish beef. But we do not have the same system of traceability as exists in the north of Ireland. What I want to charge the Secretary of State for Scotland with this evening is that Aberdeen and Northern Marts has had on the shelf for two years a working model of how to introduce traceability into the Scottish market. Brian Pack, the chief executive of Aberdeen and Northern Marts—the largest meat company in Scotland—said in *The Herald* on 9 November last year:

"Our total frustration is that we should have had a scheme in place now. If we had started eight months ago, it would have been."

In other words, the traceability scheme that is on the shelf in that company—which has had feasibility studies carried out—could have been introduced within six months. Although that scheme was offered to the Scottish Office, the Scottish Office expressed little or no interest, preferring to bungle through with the position adopted by the Government. Even now, there is little confidence in the industry in the system of traceability that the Government want to introduce in mainland Britain. It has been called "a paper chase" by those in the know in the National Farmers Union for Scotland.

The second failure of the Secretary of State for Scotland was in not realising that traceability was going to be important and not taking the opportunity to put that last cog into the wheel of a Scottish application. His third area of culpability is in the selective cull. Because of the low ratio of BSE cases in both Northern Ireland and Scotland, the selective cull was not a difficult administrative matter. Relatively few beasts had to be slaughtered under the selective cull, and yet because of the political resistance that emerged last year, the Government delayed, prevaricated and refused to go forward with the cull—despite the fact that there was unanimous support across political interests in Scotland and Northern Ireland for hastening the achievement of that prerequisite for lifting the ban.

I do not speak tonight with wisdom after the event. Along with many hon. Members from Northern Ireland, and a number of Labour and Liberal Democrat Members, I signed an early-day motion tabled by the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) on 23 April 1996. The early-day motion put forward the argument that I am enunciating this evening, and which has been reflected in the speeches of many hon. Members. However, the Minister and the Scottish Secretary said that our proposals would have been a disastrous argument to put forward. The Scottish Secretary accused us of

"stabbing the industry in the back."

Almost a year later, it is clear who was stabbing the Scottish beef industry in the back. It is the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who stand indicted of the most serious charges.

I regret the way in which the motion has been tabled, as it could have united all the Opposition parties because of the combination of interests on the subject. It would have been sensible on those grounds for the Labour Front Bench to consult on the issue before they tabled the motion, and it was foolish and inept not to do so. None the less, we have to judge the issue on its merits and, on its merits, the Minister deserves to have his salary cut by £1,000. Beef producers in my constituency would think that £1,000 is nowhere near enough. He would be lucky to be left with £1,000 if there was a vote among the farmers and producers in my constituency.

The crisis affects more than the primary producers, and we need more than the Minister saying that compensation has been paid. In both Northern Ireland and Scotland, no amount of compensation will compensate for the loss of the best-price market—the export market—which pays prices that no one else will pay for Scottish and Northern Irish beef. The industry cannot be supported indefinitely by compensation, and stories from the industry make us well aware of that.

In addition, the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland held a meeting last weekend at Thainstone house hotel in Inverurie at which reference was made to cases of haulier companies which are under severe financial pressure. This matter affects businesses in all parts of the food industry. Unless something is done, I have no reason to believe that the original forecast of 6,000 job losses in Scotland, made by TSB economists, will be wide of the mark. The people responsible for that crisis and disaster sit on the Treasury Bench.

8.25 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): The timing of this debate is wrong. The BSE crisis has been the most serious for the British farming industry that working farmers can remember. To trivialise it in this way and at this time will achieve no purpose—except perhaps to show that although the Liberal Democrats disagree with the official Opposition on the timing of this debate, they will go where their leader tells them to go. Their leader, it appears, is the Leader of the Opposition.

Labour has promised spending constraints, but what would its attitude be if it was in government and was asked to spend £3.3 billion to deal with this crisis? Would Labour stump up the money? I do not believe so, and nor do British farmers. Would Labour listen to hon. Members from agricultural constituencies—as my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has done—asking for help for farmers in their constituencies? Labour would not listen to those voices because I do not believe that, at heart, it represents countryside and agricultural interests.

Would Labour work every hour—as my right hon. and learned Friend, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and other MAFF colleagues have done—to resolve this crisis? Would Labour Members trail the length and breadth of this land—often at the request of individual Members—to see for themselves the problems and difficulties faced by farmers, often in the most confrontational circumstances? I do not believe so. When we come down to it, the Labour party is not the party of the countryside. When farmers start to think about the general election, they will realise that that is the case.

It is interesting that this is the first BSE debate that we have had since the crisis began for which a delegation of farmers has not come from Somerset to get their points across to Members of Parliament. I expect the same is true of farmers from across the country. The debate is ill-judged, ill-timed and not about BSE. It is about raw politics, and is an attempt to embarrass the Government. The farmers of this country will see through that stunt.

Relationships between farmers and rural Members of Parliament are extremely strong. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling)

[Mr. Mark Robinson]

said that he had not been besieged by a great mailbag during the crisis; it was not necessary to have a great mailbag, because our farmers were in touch with us—we have regular liaison—the moment that the crisis broke. Despite many angry words, that relationship has strengthened.

That is not only my view: when Somerset had its annual National Farmers Union dinner at the time of the NFU conference, I was struck by what representatives said about the way in which we had been able to work together in a difficult and confrontational crisis. We will continue to work together.

An attack was launched against the Government today for not getting the accelerated scheme going earlier. When we had the great backlog in the lead-up to Christmas, farmers did not want the accelerated scheme; they wanted the backlog dealt with by Christmas. In their hearts they did not believe that we would deliver; but we did, and that was extremely important to them. That is recognised as the dialogue continues about the way forward.

The way forward is the priority of getting the British beef ban lifted. That is why, often against their better judgment, members of the NFU have come round to the need to go ahead with the accelerated cull. Certainly, my constituent who is the NFU chairman in Somerset was until recently totally opposed to the accelerated cull, but he recognises the need for it, because he knows that above all else we need to get Europe to lift the ban.

I listened with great sympathy to what Ulster Members said on the subject. We should try to find the key—if there is one—to unlock the ban. I hope that the Minister will listen to what Ulster Members have said. We all have common cause on the issue. Farmers in my constituency—a beef-producing constituency—want to get their export markets back, and if it means somebody else getting theirs back first, they do not care, provided that it sets a path that they will be able to follow. I would say the same about Scotland. If the key to unlocking the ban is to move selectively, we must consider that option.

I want to say a word about the resilience of the British consumer. I have been struck by the way in which the beef market has collapsed in countries such as France and Germany and by the way in which it has held up here, despite all the tabloid stories and scares. As I go around my constituency, I see signs saying, "Eat British Beef", in fields and in cars; and when I talk to butchers, they say, "Yes, I've even had people coming into my shop and saying, 'We might not have bought beef this week, but we're going to now.'"

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer) said: schools operating a ban on beef through their county councils should bring it to an end at once. British beef is the safest in the world. There is no doubt about that. It is perfectly safe, and let us make sure that it is eaten at every opportunity.

I want to say a word about the Minister who is the subject of the motion. We may have had our arguments and difficulties, but nobody can doubt his dedication to trying to get the crisis resolved. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, for the way in which he visited Somerset and Devon at the height of the crisis and listened to what our farmers had to say.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), has been praised in many farming quarters in the south-west and has developed a reputation throughout the crisis as the listening Minister. Farmers have wanted reassurance throughout; they have wanted to be heard, and to know that the Government were getting on and trying to resolve the crisis.

At the start of the crisis, no one realised that more than 1 million animals would have to be killed, but that turned out to be the scale of the problem; it was unprecedented, and of course there were serious hiccups and great frustration along the route. In the face of all the criticism and difficulties, our Ministers put their heads down and got on with the job. That is why we were able to meet the important deadline of finishing the cull before Christmas. I hope that the House will thoroughly reject the motion.

8.35 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Not unnaturally, this has been a highly charged and highly partisan debate. The hon. Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer) acknowledged that there had been some disagreements about BSE on the Government side, although he did not go into great detail, but the vast majority of the debate has been not about the BSE crisis but about the way in which the Government have handled it.

It is quite right for us to hold the Government to account, although I share some other Opposition Members' concerns about the way in which the Labour party tabled the motion without consulting us. Had we been able to offer some advice to Labour on the matter, the result of the vote tonight might have been different.

It is important to place it on record that Conservative Members have, by and large, failed to recognise the fiasco that took place in many parts of rural Wales during the operation of the over-30-months scheme. I remember the time, although the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) clearly does not, when thousands of farmers descended on Westminster because the Government had failed to get the scheme properly organised. Farmers asked them week after week to prepare a scheme to enable animals to be dealt with in an orderly fashion.

The problem was that dealers were going around the country offering deals to farmers to get their animals in through the back door, and for months the Government did nothing to stop it. The problem was compounded because at the time when Welsh beef was hitting the markets in great quantities, the Government cut the compensation price. The farmers most affected were not those who had got their animals in through the back door, but the honest farmers, who had waited in the queue, seen the market price fall and had the compensation cut imposed on them by the Government with no consultation whatever.

Those facts needed to be placed on the record tonight, because Welsh farmers were decidedly unhappy with the way in which both the Welsh Office and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food handled the whole affair.

There has been general support for the idea that we should move towards an accelerated cull, but several questions remain about the way in which the Government should handle the compensation. We know that this is a contrived debate; it is about BSE, but it must go wider

than that, because the Government stand charged with failing to deliver on the issue. That is why we will be in the Lobby with the Labour party tonight. It is not because we do not have concerns about the way in which the debate has been handled or because we agree with everything that has been said by Opposition Members but because we believe that there should be a general election. This is a tired Government who have run out of ideas on BSE as on so many other issues.

On one of his rare visits to Wales last week, the Prime Minister told us that we were not entitled to look after our own affairs in any shape or form and that the Conservatives had looked after us in Wales. I know that my farmers will not buy that at the ballot box on 1 May or on any other date.

I want to challenge the Government on several issues relevant to the debate. First, there must be movement towards lifting the export ban. We know that the Government have moved towards the accelerated cull scheme; we must ensure that there is a firm timetable for lifting the ban.

I shall cut across some of the consensus that has built up in the House on the certified herd scheme. There is some unease—I put it no higher than that—in Wales about its operation. My farmers fear that it might lead to a two-tier industry. I have heard some powerful arguments about the situation in Northern Ireland and I hope that they are correct. If that is the way forward, the Government will have to consider it carefully. However, I must express the reservations felt by many beef farmers in Wales about whether the scheme would of itself lead to the lifting of the ban for all parts of the United Kingdom. I am sure that the Welsh Office Minister, the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), who is present, knows the reservations of both farming unions in Wales on the matter.

I ask the Government to recognise that far from their actions being responsible for maintaining the beef industry, it is the resilience of farmers and the good sense of many consumers who were not swayed by the tabloid press that has kept the industry going. It is remarkable that the industry has survived the crisis as well as it has. That says something for the way in which our farmers have operated.

It is important that the Welsh Office ensures that Welsh beef is properly marketed. One of the remarkable successes of recent years has been Welsh lamb, which is widely regarded as being of the highest quality not only in Wales and the other countries of the United Kingdom but across Europe. It is a branded product that has had remarkable success. Given that we need to restore confidence in the beef industry, I ask the Government to recognise the need to put further money into the marketing of Welsh beef as a branded product. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales knows of the paper presented by Professor Gareth Wyn Jones at a conference held by the Institute of Welsh Affairs Aberystwyth last year in which he set out conditions in which such a scheme could operate. A properly funded marketing and sales scheme, underpinned by Welsh Office support, would do much to support the beef industry in Wales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jonathan Evans): In case my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster cannot deal with that point in his reply, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows of my announcement at the National Farmers Union annual general meeting about additional support for Welsh food promotion and specifically for a Welsh beef marketing campaign. The matter is at the forefront of the mind of the Welsh Office.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful for that intervention, but we want a much expanded and more comprehensive scheme similar to that which was so successful for Welsh lamb. However, I still indict the Government for their failure throughout the crisis fully to appreciate the context in which the dangers that face our farmers occurred. That is why we will vote with Labour tonight.

8.44 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): On personal grounds, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones). As he is aware, I know his constituency well. I do not agree with many of his points but I welcome his recognition that it is a contrived debate.

That point was also made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and other non-Labour Opposition Members. They disagree strongly with how the Labour party has approached this contrived debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), and my hon. Friends the Members for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson), for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer) and for West Gloucestershire (Mr. Marland), all noted that no gain can result from the hype about this debate but that there may well be damage to the beef industry. It may affect McDonalds' decision about whether to return to British beef and other matters.

I am surprised that the Opposition did not table a motion of censure last October when the farming community was much aggravated about what were, perhaps, episodes of maladministration in the handling of the over-30-months cull. As several Conservative Members have said, why move this artificial censure motion now? The matter has progressed satisfactorily over the past few months.

I am glad that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) is in his place because I tried to intervene on him. I shall read his speech carefully. I caution him—and he knows my concern on this—that whereas we have both worked with other hon. Members on the damage to human health caused by the use of organophosphate sheep dips, we must be careful about giving credence to the views of Mark Purdey about a possible link between OP dips and BSE because of the damage that could be done to the sheep industry, on which my constituency greatly depends.

Conservative Members are not complacent—I certainly am not—about the past handling of the matter or present prospects. I have known my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture for more than 30 years. Let us admit that he has not always behaved in accordance with the Mandelson school of public relations in being able to depict black as white and white as black. His Department has not always operated as effectively as we might have wished, in policy making, administration or in passing information or advice to farmers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater, who has direct experience of large Departments such as Defence, the Environment and Employment, noted that contrast. Those who are concerned with the machinery of Government need to take that on board because MAFF has had problems.

[Mr. David Nicholson]

I welcome what has been said by Opposition Members, especially Northern Ireland Members, and by several Conservative Members about it being desirable for the Government to be more positive in getting accredited herd status and so lifting the ban in Northern Ireland. I will listen to what farmers in my Somerset constituency say about that, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome said, they are likely to welcome it as light at the end of the tunnel. At the moment there is complete darkness. If we can start the process in Northern Ireland, where the case is good, and move it on elsewhere, it will bring hope to farmers throughout the country.

The BSE crisis has been a great tragedy that has cost an enormous amount of money. Other hon. Members have talked about being in the business of accusing. I accuse those responsible for the original leak. I cannot think of a leak—even the work of a spy—that has done more damage in terms of cost to taxpayers, industry and businesses of all sorts than the leak to the *Daily Mirror* that prompted the crisis. I hope that every farm in the country has the front page from the *Daily Mirror* pinned up somewhere as a reminder of the way in which that newspaper exploited the evidence and printed the photograph of a dying patient on the front page. That was horrific.

Mention has also been made of the way in which, in those early days before more sober counsels took over in the Labour party, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) fanned the flames, which played into the hands of those in Europe who, for a variety of reasons, wanted to ban our exports.

To those criticisms and to the list of those whom I accuse I would add the health mafia. We shall not know for 30 years what discussions took place within the Department of Health before the announcement of 20 March, but only a few days ago we saw evidence of the overreaction of the health mafia, when Professor Lacey criticised the promotion of eggs. Apparently some eggs were shown as being runny and he has warned us that that can have terrible effects. A little silence from Professor Lacey might be welcome.

Using written answers, I have done some research into the number of deaths from one or two fairly horrific diseases and the amount of money that has been spent on research and prevention. I give these figures for the purpose of comparison; I am not ramming home any stark conclusion. In recent years, we have come to fear meningitis considerably. In 1995, 196 people died from it and the provisional total for 1996 is 230 deaths. In 1995, 1,259 people died from AIDS in the United Kingdom; in 1996, the number was, mercifully, lower, with 802 deaths from the disease. Large sums are spent on dealing with those two diseases, but they are small compared with the sums mentioned in this debate. The Medical Research Council spends £1.5 million a year on meningitis research. Health authorities spent £186 million on treatment for AIDS in 1996-97 and £51 million on prevention.

Although I appreciate that we are dealing with wider industrial compensation, over the two or three years affected by this great BSE crisis, we will have spent £3.5 billion because of a possible link with certain types of CJD. Yet, according to the figures given to me, the total number of deaths attributed to definite or probable cases of CJD in the United Kingdom was 46 in 1995 and 39 in 1996, of which three deaths in 1995 and nine in 1996 were possibly from the new version. Those figures should be contrasted with the deaths from and research into other terrible diseases.

I join other hon. Members in complimenting the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), on her achievements during this dreadful crisis. I am glad to see my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster sitting next to her on the Treasury Bench. He came to Taunton last November and spoke to market people, auctioneers, farmer representatives and others about prospects for the cull and I compliment him on what he achieved in that respect.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the selective cull and some have suggested that MAFF should speed it up. A few weeks ago, before the House was being asked to approve the order for the selective cull, I received a letter from the chairman of the Taunton Vale NFU. He took a slightly different line, saying:

"I hope that MAFF will proceed in such a manner that will disrupt farmers as little as it is possible and not use it"—

the selective cull—

"as an exercise to show how quickly and efficiently it is able to carry out such an exercise regardless of the consequences to the farmer."

He went on to say that there should be

"maximum flexibility on the timing of slaughter."

He added:

"To take quickly will disrupt the farmers business greatly"—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am afraid that time is up.

8.54 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I speak with some trepidation, because several hon. Members have been told that special qualifications are required to participate in this debate. If one represents a reasonably urban constituency as I do—although I represent half a dozen farms in Huddersfield—those qualifications are in doubt. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), the shadow spokesman on agriculture, despite being highly qualified as a scientist—he has a first degree from Edinburgh university and a masters specialist degree in agricultural science from Cambridge university—and being the son of a farmer, was told by a barrister that he is not competent to lead in the debate. That was astonishing.

We in this House have a long tradition—certainly under the Conservative Government—which we have witnessed tonight. When a Minister is under fire and he happens to be an old Etonian, there is only one qualification for speaking from the Conservative Benches and that is having been to Eton as well. It is a sign of the Minister's failure that only four ex-Etonians have rallied to the cause tonight, whereas there were seven or eight when the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) was in trouble. There is obviously some lack of confidence in the Minister, even among the old school.

I want to speak seriously about this tragedy. One does not have to be a farmer or represent a farming constituency to realise its enormity. BSE has been a

tragedy for farmers, for consumers and for the animals that are being put down and burnt rather than living until the time when they would normally go to the market. We in this country have traditionally had a wonderful farming industry and it has come under tremendous pressure because of the inattentions of the Government.

We have always needed a well-regulated farming industry, especially when there are pressures arising from the chemical and pharmaceutical industries pushing different sorts of nitrate fertilisers or modern insecticides and weedkillers in the name of plant protection. We know that there are great pressures on the farming community and none is as great as that of the demand for cheap food, which Opposition Members believe often comes from rather dubious sources. We all share responsibility for that pressure, which arises from our desire to have cheap food. The pressure to do things on the cheap—to use anything that increases productivity and to go for quantity rather than quality—lies at the heart of the problems affecting the British farming industry. When that pressure continues over a period of years, it only needs certain elements to start going wrong before we have a crisis such as the current BSE crisis.

Although I have no great knowledge of farming, I have some knowledge of something called crisis management. I participate in seminars for industrialists who have to learn about it. That is a compulsory part of the training that must be undertaken by those who reach a certain rung of the career ladder in the large chemical and energy companies: they must learn how to handle a crisis. Such people will tell hon. Members what I have been told by many leading industrialists who have viewed the unfolding of this tragedy with dismay.

We know how the tragedy unfolded. We know that there was a leak—a leak that appeared in media other than the *Daily Mirror*. I understand that no attempt was made to recognise the seriousness of the impending disaster: the disaster that would ensue if matters got out of control and the crisis was not managed properly. No attempt was made to talk to the Opposition seriously, and to point out that such a major crisis could affect one of our most crucial industries and the welfare and jobs involved in that industry. No one said, "We must talk about this, and ensure that things do not get out of control and cause a crisis that will damage all our interests." If such an approach had been taken, at the proper level, Opposition Members would have agreed to adopt a shared, or more muted, stance.

Sir Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: No, I will not. I have only 10 minutes in which to speak.

Let us look at the way in which the crisis unfolded. As we all know, we have an agreement behind the scenes—behind the Speaker's Chair. We all know when it is going to be a quiet week, and the week of this crisis was scheduled to be a quiet week. The Prime Minister was going to make a major speech before a by-election that was crucial for his party. I was with the leader of our party when he launched our small firms policy in the City of London; it had been agreed that there would be nothing much on in the House on that day, and, indeed, during that part of the week.

The next thing we knew was that messages had come through about a statement not just from one Minister, but from two Secretaries of State. That is almost unheard of. Everyone, not only in the House but outside, knows that it means something if two Secretaries of State, including a senior Cabinet Minister—the Secretary of State for Health—run into the Chamber and say that there is a crisis. Two Secretaries of State came in and said that there was a crisis.

In the approach to a general election, we must all be partisan; but any fair-minded person reading the *Hansard* report of the Minister's statement and the Opposition response will realise that no other response could have been made by anyone. In fact, the Opposition's response was very muted. I thought that the most outrageous response came from a Conservative Member—the hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who is not present now but who asked the Minister an interesting and rather inflammatory question.

We are now in a global economy. Most people who run banks or other big financial institutions know that something careless that they say at a dinner party or over the weekend can change the whole structure of a financial market. That can be gathered from any of the leading American industrialists who saw the value of their shares drop by 5 per cent. overnight following a careless remark made only a few weeks before. I spoke to someone—this is a comment on that global economy—who was in CNN's headquarters in Atlanta, and saw those two Secretaries of State come in. He commented: "We knew immediately"—in Atlanta!—"that something serious was up, because we saw the shaking hands of the Secretary of State for Health. He did not even have to say anything; we saw the picture, transmitted all those thousands of miles, instantly."

In crisis management, people are told, "You have 10 minutes or 10 hours, but if you do not manage a crisis in that time you can forget it." That is acknowledged by Shell, and by all the big energy companies. British Gas knows it only too well. In this instance, we had a crisis that was spiralling out of control; then, making matters even worse, the Government said, "There is a crisis—there is a problem—but we are not going to do all that much about it. Indeed, we will tell you about the most sensitive issue, our children's health, next Monday." No sensible person involved in crisis management would allow a weekend to pass, featuring comment from the Sunday press. The Sunday press is the worst in terms of speculation, tabloid circulation and the building up of stories—and we all knew that that story would go through the roof. Then it was out of control.

That is where we are now. I lack confidence not only in the Minister of Agriculture, who has hardly been present throughout the evening, but in the Secretary of State for Health, because of his complicity in what has been a disaster for agriculture and for farming.

The crisis could have been avoided, but every man, woman and child in this country is now lumbered with even more debt—2p on income tax to pay the £3.5 billion cost of the crisis. If we, as a loyal Opposition, had not called this debate, we would have been failing in our duty. It is not only a crisis but a sad comment on a Government who cannot govern.

9.4 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): The hon. Member for Taunton said rightly—it is the only thing he said that was quite right—that the BSE crisis should have

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

been debated on the Floor—[HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Member for Huddersfield."] The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said that the BSE crisis should have been debated on the Floor of the House, and he is right, but what an inopportune moment to do so. I listened to his rambles. I thought that they were a preamble, but the preamble went on for 10 minutes. I can only think that he lives very close to the Emley Moor transmitter and that his brain has been partly microwaved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), however, made a valid point when he said that the timing and choice of the debate have been inept. Why? My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should have been in Brussels today because today is the day that the Council of Ministers debates this very issue, and what is on the agenda but the British beef crisis? Instead we have a debate today that was chosen to fit in—so it was thought—with the forthcoming general election.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield spoke about crisis management, but how well have the Labour team organised the crisis that they have engineered today? All last week, we heard the Opposition Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), telling everyone that the debate would lead to a vote of no confidence. We were told that there would be a general election in three or four weeks and that we would have to gird our loins. He was not mealy-mouthed about it; he openly admitted on "Newsnight" and other programmes that this was an opportunistic moment because it would be the time to get rid of the present Government.

Labour could not even manage that properly, could it? It has bungled that. It could not even liaise with the minority parties, so the matter will die like a damp squib in about 54 minutes from now, when the Opposition lose the vote.

To put matters into perspective, excluding the beef sector, agriculture has been enjoying a period of unprecedented prosperity, despite the Labour party, whose members have never been known as friends of agriculturists. Since when have farmers ever said, "We welcome the idea of the Labour party getting into office because the Labour party cares"?

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fabricant: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman because time is limited.

We should remember that since 1992—five years ago—total income from farming has increased by 85 per cent. in real terms. The industry's assets are eight times greater than its liabilities. The 1996 harvest was the second largest in Britain's history. The beef assurance scheme has been introduced by the Government to register beef herds that have never been exposed to BSE. We must all welcome that.

I have considerable sympathy, however, with those Members representing Northern Ireland who have spoken in the debate. I worked in Northern Ireland for a short time and I am very conscious of the fact that the management of herds in Northern Ireland differs markedly from that in the rest of the United Kingdom. Not only are most beef herds fed on natural grass but, as has been said, there is a system of tagging or passporting, which I believe that the rest of the country would do well to emulate. I understand that we are starting to do just that.

Opposition Members have spoken about the fact that BSE has cost us £3.5 billion so far. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), the agriculture spokesman of the Labour party, which is so caring of our farmers, is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench. He criticised the fact that we have spent £3.5 billion on the crisis. Is he saying that we should be spending less? Although I did not give way earlier to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), I should be happy to give way now to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East if he will tell us whether the Labour party would not be spending £3.5 billion on the beef crisis. All he does is sit there, shrug his shoulders, close his eyes and smile to himself. He has no answer. When he attacked the Government for spending £3.5 billion, it was no more than empty rhetoric. It is always empty rhetoric from the Opposition.

What does the Labour party, which claims to care so much about the beef crisis, do? The shadow Health Secretary, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), sounded such a trivial note at this time of crisis, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield called it. What question did she ask the Secretary of State for Health? Was is a question that could help the farmers, as Labour cares so much for them? She asked:

> "Will the Secretary of State confirm that SEAC members who are parents or grandparents are not giving beef to their children or grandchildren?"—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 377.]

That was the intellectual question that she asked the Secretary of State.

Now the Opposition say, "Mea non culpa—we are not responsible for causing a crisis." What are they doing today? They are attempting to put the fear of eating beef into people's minds, with the sole object of trying to bring about a general election. As I said previously, they bungled that.

The debate was born out of opportunism. It is not a debate born out of love of farming. It is not a debate to enable Labour to put forward solutions of its own, because none has been forthcoming. It has been an ill-timed debate, preventing the Minister of Agriculture from arguing our corner in Brussels today. It has shown new Labour at its worst—a red dwarf with a hindsight chip plugged into a soundbite machine, with no forward vision and no solutions to our farming future.

9.11 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): It does not give me a great deal of pleasure to follow the epitome of a soundbite machine that we have just heard.

Let us remember that the debate is about competence—or rather, incompetence. Like me, many Opposition Members represent constituencies where there are large numbers of beef farmers, none of whom believed that the Minister's performance with regard to the over-30-months cull was competent.

I have been amazed by statements from Conservative Members, and especially from the Minister when he referred to the over-30-months scheme as being completed. That is an extraordinary thing to say, when a

mere 4 per cent. of that cull has been destroyed. The rest is in cold storage and warehouses all over the country, costing £250,000 a week. I understand that 50,000 tonnes of beef carcase and rendered bone meal are in eight cold stores and warehouses in Northern Ireland. That is symptomatic of the incompetence surrounding the entire programme.

I shall focus briefly on the disposal aspect. The Minister should recognise how moderate the motion is, as it simply asks him to give up in one year what his failure is costing in storage alone half an hour of every day of every week of the year—a small amount.

The debate may be an opportunity to ask some relevant questions about disposal. Has any plan or programme detailing the disposal of at least a million slaughtered cattle been drawn up and put in the public domain? No one denies the magnitude of that operation. If such a plan exists, who approved it and when? How many times has it been revised? Which Department will take the lead in implementing it? Is it the Ministry of Agriculture or the Department of the Environment? If it is the latter, we shall call for another debate and bring it to account. Was it suggested that the rendered remains could go to landfill? There seems to be total confusion as to whether that is likely to happen.

The Environmental Services Association has expressed its gratitude, and the chief executive, Peter Neill, said that the waste industry is pleased to have obtained contracts not only for incineration but for landfill. Yet answers to parliamentary questions have made it clear that high-temperature incineration is the only option for disposing of rendered remains. When was the policy revised and when did it change? There are huge differences in the cost: £40 per tonne for landfill and £315 per tonne for incinerating rendered material. If the landfill option has been rejected, the public should know what the incineration proposal involves.

If the Government are considering using power stations, cement kilns or any other incinerator operation in this country to dispose of the remains, the public must know where those operations will be sited and what tests will be conducted. For example, this weekend people in the Selby area of Yorkshire responded angrily to the news that the Drax power station is to be allowed to use pet coke as a cheap substitute for Yorkshire coal. People living in the vicinity of any such plant must be consulted and should be told in advance of any tests and advised of their results.

The Minister has said that no incineration plant has failed its emission level tests. I am surprised to hear that, as the Environment Agency in the Yorkshire and north-east region has advised me that the Leeds incinerator plant failed those tests. Parliamentary questions have elicited totally contradictory answers on the subject. I suggested that the Environment Select Committee, of which I am privileged to be a member, conduct an inquiry into the issue. However, because I raised the issue formally and put my suggestion in writing to the Committee Chairman, no fewer than six Conservative Members attended the Committee meeting in order to turn down my request. I was told that the issue was too politically sensitive before the election.

Does that suggest that Conservative Members have total confidence in the Minister and in his performance on one aspect of the crisis, which epitomises the disposal chaos? I believe that it is a serious issue. If the scrutiny processes of this House are not allowed to work properly on sensitive issues, it brings the role of parliamentary scrutiny into disrepute.

This debate is the beginning, not the end, of the issue. It is quite wrong for hon. Members to suggest that this is the end of the crisis. Only 4 per cent. of carcases have been destroyed; 96 per cent. still have to be dealt with. Every hon. Member is likely to have in his or her constituency a cold store full of dead cattle; or a warehouse full of rendered bonemeal and meat from the cull; or a power station incinerating the remains; or a landfill site that may have already been used to dump BSE waste.

The Minister has consistently underplayed the scale of the crisis. He has miscalculated the importance of being seen to undertake an effective cull swiftly and smoothly in trying to get the export ban lifted. By wishing the problem away, he has failed to set in place an effective disposal programme. He believed that rendered remains could be disposed of through landfill, despite concerns about the risk of contaminants. He has delayed putting in place a safe programme of incineration and disposal, but allowed the programme to be dictated by a group of rendering companies and slaughterers that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) mentioned. I suspect that the Minister had a hand in pressurising the Environment Select Committee not to undertake an inquiry into the disposal aspects of BSE.

My belief is that the Minister is out of his depth and he knows that he is. His failure to manage the crisis is plain for all to see. I hope that Conservative Members will consider tabling a further amendment to the very modest Opposition amendment, and that they will propose that the Minister relinquishes his post as soon as possible.

9.21 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The debate has outlined the catalogue of incompetence in the Government's handling of the BSE crisis. It is just not good enough to try to hide behind the argument that to raise these issues jeopardises the beef industry. We on the Labour Benches have been very measured in our criticism of the Government because of our concern about the beef industry.

Some of the comments in the debate were utterly pathetic. Attacks were made on my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), who was criticised as urban-based. It was pathetic to criticise someone who is a son of a farmer; who is an agricultural scientist; who was a former Agriculture Minister; and who has better qualifications than anyone currently on the Conservative Benches. It was pathetic that a tasteless joke was directed against my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). Compared to the popularity of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East, the Minister is about as popular as a rattlesnake in a lucky dip, and that is just with the farmers, let alone the public.

From the very beginning of this whole sorry episode, the Government's mania for deregulation added to the problems, going right back to 1979, when they failed to implement the protein processing order proposed by the 1979 Labour Government. Deregulation added to the problems of cross-contamination of feed which came later.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

Throughout this whole sorry tale, as was made clear by my hon. Friends the Members for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) and for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), the Government have been slow to react, and were incompetent when they did so. Even when, in June 1987, they were made aware that there was a problem, they did not take any action until June 1988. They waited a year, even though they recognised that BSE was a problem.

The Government did not implement all the recommendations of the Southwood report or the Tyrrell report. To save cash, when the Government introduced a compensation scheme, they offered only 50 per cent. for affected cattle—a failure accepted by Lord Lindsay as contributing to the problem in terms of cattle that may have got into the food chain at that time.

The Government also refused to implement Labour's call for a traceability scheme in 1990. That was also reflected in the Agriculture Select Committee's report. They also cut the number of meat inspectors and environmental health inspectors. Although the specified offal ban was introduced in 1990, in 1995 the state veterinary service found failings in 48 per cent. of the slaughterhouses it visited. The extension of BSE cases was also linked to cross-contamination of feed at feed mills as a result of the Government's failure to implement proper regulation.

In March 1996, the Government accepted that there was a potential link between BSE and CJD. From that moment, much of the discussion in the House was focused on that problem, because of its dramatic effect on the beef industry. The Government failed to establish a contingency plan to deal with the crisis. Their complacency on this issue over the years was highlighted by my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) and for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who mentioned the Government's lack of credibility on crisis management.

The lack of a contingency plan led to delays in establishing the over-30-months scheme. There was confusion about a slaughter scheme that excluded many slaughterhouses, and was extremely generous—too generous—to those that took part. The way in which the scheme was implemented smacked of haste and incompetence. That is also the view of the agriculture industry.

Although the motion censures the current Minister, it would be unfair not to mention that much of the incompetence was due to the irresponsibility of his predecessors. Few hon. Members can forget the sight of poor little Cordelia being force-fed a hamburger by the former Minister of Agriculture. Although it is fair to defend the British beef industry, it is not good enough to be complacent and to attack anyone who makes the mildest criticism or suggests ways in which the Government could handle the problem better. That is what happened over the years leading up to the present crisis.

That brings us to the current Minister and his Cabinet colleagues. It would be unfair to exclude collective responsibility. This crisis is the responsibility not of one Minister but of the whole Cabinet.

Since the joint announcement in March 1996, 10,000 jobs in the beef industry have been lost, and 20,000 workers are on short time. Apart from the incompetence shown when the scheme was set up, we have had the fiasco of the European ban and the Government's attempt to lift it: the so-called beef war. What a fiasco that was. We had weeks of sabre-rattling and insults. It ended in the Florence agreement, which the Prime Minister hailed as a victory. It was a climbdown. The Commission got what it wanted, and the Prime Minister promised the House that the ban would be lifted in November 1996. We are still waiting.

Hon. Members have attempted to blame Europe. That is a bit rich coming from a Government who are guilty of incompetence, and who are responsible for the BSE crisis and for destroying the European beef industry. The European Commission's committee which looked into this problem said:

"The Agriculture Council's silence between June 1990 and July 1994, the period when the number of cases of BSE was reaching its peak in the UK, is an indictment of its inability or, at least, of its lack of determination to manage this issue."

Far from European countries colluding with each other against the British beef industry, the Council of Ministers was doing its best to keep the issue quiet, and, some would say, to defend the industry against the interests of consumers.

It is a bit difficult to blame the European Union, given that the Government, after banning the affected feed in this country, allowed it to be exported to Europe. In 1989, the amount of contaminated feed exported to European Union countries doubled. There was no labelling on those sacks, and although the Government advised that it should not be fed to cattle, there was no way in which many European farmers could identify that feed. It was clear that many of the BSE outbreaks in Europe were related to that problem.

It is fair to say that the procedures are now in place to justify a lifting of the ban. That point was made by several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall). But the Government must deal with the problem of their credibility. After agreeing to a selective cull in September, they decided that it would not be implemented. After announcing that the cull would not be implemented, they climbed down and said that the cull would be introduced.

The conditions of the Florence agreement have still not been met, and the quality assurance scheme on traceability has still not been presented to the Commission. Of course, this has implications for Northern Ireland, as we have heard, and for Scotland. There is no doubt that those areas are well placed and would certainly be in the vanguard—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but there is a undercurrent of private conversations, not confined to one side of the House. It would be courteous to listen to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Morley: As we have heard today, the certification scheme is important to Northern Ireland and to Scotland, and many other herds in England and Wales would meet the criteria laid down in the agreement.

We have heard it said tonight that farmers support the Government and back what they have done, but that does not appear to be true of those who voted in the NFU to

censure the Minister—and very few Ministers have been censured. If Conservatives want to hear the views of a farmer, not just those of the Labour party, I happen to have here a letter chosen at random from the farming press.

It is from a Mr. Cateaux of Pembrokeshire, and appeared in *Farming News*. It appears under the heading, "Catalogue of Tory incompetence"—I could not have put it better myself—and states that the Government have

"Caused the crisis by crass irresponsibility/stupidity.

Done nothing to compensate specialist beef farmers for the huge cuts in our incomes.

Ensured that most of the compensation is going to those who already get the bulk of other farm support.

Invented the calf destruction scheme on the excuse that it would mean less surplus beef to dispose of—most of the calves are useless for beef production.

Given free rein to slaughterhouse owners and their dealer agents to cream off a lot of money that is supposed to be supporting farmers.

Exploited those who had to sell over 30 month beasts dirt cheap. Because there is no official rationing of placement of cattle into the OTMS, all farmers would have had some cattle taken.

Left the running of the scheme to an old boy network so that the Mr. Bigs got preferential treatment and all their cattle taken at the highest price.

Given most of the slaughter contracts to a handful of large companies, apparently paying them rates for beasts that are far higher than normal.

Given them millions in excess profits plus the value of the skins at about £15 each.

Refused small operators contracts on the excuse they had to have EU export licences. The Commission has said this is not true.

Used the crisis . . . to lift import bans so that meat traders/supermarkets can import cheap beef from anywhere in the world."

That letter reflects the view widely held in the farming community about the impact of the Government's policy on farmers' livelihoods.

The question is whether the Government have lost confidence. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), has been appointed to front the BSE issue, making him the Minister for the Minister of Agriculture—the first such Minister in history to have a minder to go around with him. That suggests to me that his own Government do not have much confidence in him.

The final straw in this debate, and what made it clear that the motion must be supported, was the Minister's performance at the recent NFU annual general meeting. Far from being contrite and apologetic for this disaster, he and his colleagues used the opportunity deliberately to distort and misrepresent Labour party policy, and to boast about the £3.5 billion cost of the BSE package.

Some hon. Members have asked whether Labour would make that money available to agriculture. To them I would say that, had the Government implemented the measures which the Labour party has been arguing for since 1989, we would not be facing a bill for £3.5 billion, which represents 2p in the pound for every taxpayer in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Conservatives party sometimes accuses the Labour party of levying various taxes. We have been accused of levying a windfall tax and a tartan tax, but at least we have never been accused of levying an incompetence tax, which is what this Government have levied on the people of this country.

The future of the beef sector, of course, lies in the lifting of the European and worldwide ban. However, that will involve making progress on the certification scheme, which will require agreements with the Commission.

We recognise the case for Northern Ireland, and hon. Members from Northern Ireland have told us tonight how important lifting the ban is for their industry. In many ways, Northern Ireland is a special case—as are some Scottish producers—because its herds have been free from BSE. Moreover, Northern Ireland has maintained a traceability scheme, which is a very important part of any certification scheme.

However, I ask hon. Members from minority parties, and particularly those from Northern Ireland, to consider whether the Government—who have so little credibility in the European Union—will be able to make progress in gaining acceptance of a certification scheme or in lifting the European and worldwide ban. Ministers who waged the beef war seemed to think that they could get the European Union's co-operation by insulting it, and by blaming it for a crisis that was very much of their own making. We need a fresh approach to Europe to make any progress, and that will come only with a fresh Government who have a more positive and more determined approach to the issue.

Although the BSE issue is in itself worthy of discussion—as Ministers must answer some questions on it—we make no excuse for taking every opportunity to bring down the Government and to bring on a general election. Regardless of whether we succeed or fail in those objectives today, it will not alter the Government's handling of the crisis. They have damaged the industry and retarded progress in lifting the ban.

We also make no apology for having tabled today's censure motion. The Government have presided over a catalogue of incompetence and bungling which has cost farmers and taxpayers dear. For all those reasons, hon. Members should join us in the Lobby and vote against a tired, rudderless and incompetent Government. They are hanging on for no other reason than fear of presenting their record for the verdict of the British people.

9.36 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): I start by paying tribute to those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who will be retiring at the next general election, and who have probably participated in their last agriculture debate. For their very positive support today, I particularly single out my right hon. Friends the Members for Witney (Mr. Hurd) and for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and my hon. Friends the Members for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) and for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer). We thank them for their strong support.

On behalf of Conservative Members, I also pay tribute to the ministerial team at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which is led by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister, and to my hon. Friends the Minister of State and the two Parliamentary Secretaries. They have pursued the matter with determination and robustness. They have put up with a lot of abuse, and they have succeeded.

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

I am sure that I speak for both sides of the House when I say that I do not think that any hon. Member underestimates the scale of the impact of the BSE crisis on the families affected by the new strain of Creuztfeldt-Jacob disease—15 cases have now been identified—on farmers, on the industry or on the taxpayer. The Government maintain four key principles in dealing with the crisis: to protect public health; to eradicate BSE as quickly as possible—my right hon. and learned Friend the Agriculture Minister said that we will achieve that goal by 2001—to support the farming industry in achieving a balance in supply and demand; and to reopen world markets for British beef. Those are the principles on which we have been working.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), who opened the debate, questioned the timetable and the progress that we have made. As late as the middle of July, we forecast that, by the middle of October, we could meet the conditions and start the process of lifting the ban in stages; during the summer, dairy farmers in particular chose to put more than 250,000 extra dairy cows into the over-30-months scheme. No one forecast that, not even the Opposition. We therefore had to take urgent action to increase rendering capacity and the amount of cold storage, and we were able to clear the backlog in the over-30-months scheme with only two months' delay.

According to *The Independent on Sunday*, the deputy leader of the Labour party, with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson), have suddenly discovered that we have been using cold storage. Given the sharp, deft, rapier-like thrusts of the deputy leader of the Labour party, I read:

"So we face a choice of turning power stations into incinerators, creating mass graves in our countryside, or maintaining mountains of containerised carcasses—without spreading fear of disease being passed by air, land or water."

What a reasonable statement.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Freeman: No, I shall not give way because I have a lot to get through. Let me tell the hon. Lady that we have not a million carcases in cold storage but 265,000, with 2,900 at Hull. That was a great success for the Ministry of Agriculture because it enabled us to increase the slaughter rate and deal with the backlog in the OTM scheme. There are no mass graves in our countryside and there is no fear of disease.

Mrs. Jackson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Lady will resume her seat I shall answer the question that she raised. All the cattle remains must be either rendered, incinerated or both; we do not propose to use landfill. That is why it will take some time to take the carcases out of cold storage and render them properly. The Government should be congratulated on the steps that they have taken.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Freeman: I shall not give way—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East argued that we should have started the selective cull earlier. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister said clearly that, during the summer, the National Farmers Union opposed a selective cull; it has now changed its mind and supports one. The hon. Gentleman suggested that we should have started preparations for a selective cull by identifying the cattle in the autumn. That could not be achieved. One either starts the selective cull, identifies the cattle, agrees the compensation and puts restrictions on the movement of cattle—or not. We have not been in a position to do that until now. I am glad to confirm to the House that we are ready to start slaughtering under the selective cull scheme in about three weeks' time.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Freeman: I am sorry, but I cannot give way. I must respond to the debate.

I confirm that we expect the selective cull in Northern Ireland to start on 3 March, about the same time as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

We shall shortly have met all the Florence conditions. We have cleaned up feed at mills and on farms, and banned contaminated feed from 1 August. We have begun the process of tracing cattle and my right hon. and learned Friend has introduced a passport scheme from 1 July. We now have some of the best slaughterhouse standards in the world. We have cleared the backlog in the over-30-months scheme and we shall shortly implement the cull. We shall then formally submit to the European Commission the certified herd scheme and we hope and expect a good and full response from the Commission. As the House will understand, that must follow the detailed process laid down in the Florence agreement.

I come now to the points raised by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). Quite properly, I have visited Ulster twice in the past few months. I know full well that the beef industry there relies on exports and has been particularly hard hit. My right hon. and learned Friend has made it clear that the scheme that we shall put forward to the Commission applies to the whole United Kingdom, but as it is based on good traceability and the absence of BSE from herds, it will be of direct and immediate benefit to Northern Irish farmers. That was very much in our minds when we devised the scheme.

My right hon. and learned Friend has said today that the case for direct and immediate relief for Northern Ireland is very strong—indeed, unanswerable. So it is. He has said that he will urge the case of Northern Ireland. So he will. For the avoidance of doubt, let me make it clear that while other parts of the United Kingdom may have producers who qualify too—I think of Scotland and the west country in particular; the scheme is designed to be open to all parts of the country—it is certain that none will have a stronger or more immediate claim for relief than Northern Ireland. That is the case for Northern Ireland that my right hon. and learned Friend will urge in the coming negotiations.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry raised a second point about the additional EC support for the beef industry, and in particular for Northern Ireland. I am glad to be able to tell the House that my noble Friend Baroness Denton, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office, having consulted the farming unions in Northern Ireland, has decided on the distribution

of the additional EC support for the beef industry. Besides £250,000 for beef promotion, £9.4 million will be available for suckler cow herds. All suckler herd owners will receive a £25 per head top-up to the suckler cow premium, but in recognition of the unique problems faced by the flagged suckler herd owners, and with the support of the representative organisations, those herd owners will receive an additional £135 to £145 per animal. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. There are far too many conversations going on in the House. The House must come to order to listen to what the Minister has to say.

Mr. Freeman: I now come to the—

Mrs. Jackson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I believe that the Minister has misled the House.

Madam Speaker: Order. That is a most serious accusation. Will the hon. Lady raise a point of order so that I know what I can do about it?

Mrs. Jackson: I have evidence that contracts have been let that involve the landfilling of rendered waste from the over-30-months cull. I have just been told that that is not true. Either this evidence is not true, or what the Minister has said is not true. I want to raise the issue because it needs clearing up.

Madam Speaker: I understand what the hon. Lady is saying. It is not really a point of order, it is a point of argument. I am sure that the Minister is able to cope with it.

Mr. Freeman: I confirm to the House—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I want the House to listen. This is very important. The House must listen to what the Minister has to say on this important issue.

Mr. Freeman: I confirm to the hon. Lady and to the House that, for the over-30-months scheme, there will be no landfill of carcases or rendered material. All material is to be rendered and incinerated. If the hon. Lady has any evidence, I should be delighted to receive it. I have stated the Government's policy clearly.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) sought to exaggerate greatly the impact of the selective cull on the dairy herd. He said that he expected between a third and a half of the dairy herd to be affected by the selective cull. That is a gross exaggeration that he has repeated on a number of occasions. I am pleased to confirm to the House that what he has said is not the case. The total number of animals to be culled under the scheme will be, at most, 128,000. We expect the figure to be much lower. The total number of animals in the UK dairy herd is about 2.5 million, so the proportion to be culled is, at most, 5 per cent. I agree with hon. Members on both sides of the House who said that they expect the selective cull to be handled in a sympathetic, sensitive fashion. Indeed it will. It will take up to six months to slaughter all the additional cattle involved.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Witney and for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) accurately summed up the purpose of the debate. They both said that the Labour party was turning an agricultural crisis into narrow party advantage. On 26 May 1996, the *News of the World* said—*[Interruption.]* I would be grateful if the Labour Front Bench team would listen. The paper said:

"Whatever criticisms we have of the Government's performance so far, this is now a national crisis and Labour's response will be governed by the need to promote the national interest."

Labour Members have deserted the national interest in their behaviour—not only tonight, but consistently.

I lay three specific charges against the Labour party concerning what has been said during the past few months, and repeated again tonight. The first charge, repeated by the hon. Members for Edinburgh, East and for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), is that the regulations that the Labour party would have laid in the late 1970s—and if they had become effective—would have stopped BSE. That is the argument and it is wholly without foundation.

Mr. Prescott *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Freeman: Yes it is.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East was a junior Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the late 1970s and he will know that the charge is untrue. He will know what Keith Meldrum, the chief veterinary officer, said in giving evidence to the Agriculture Committee on 27 March 1996. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East would listen to me. When Mr. Meldrum was questioned on whether the controls proposed by the last Labour Government on animal feed—which were of course aimed at tackling salmonella, and other bacteria in feed, and not of course enacted because the Conservative Government achieved the same purpose by introducing goal-based, non-prescriptive regulations—would have protected the country against BSE, he said:

"I was involved in policy advice at that time"—

the late 1970s—

"so I was involved in those discussions"—

on Labour's draft regulations—

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Get on with it.

Mr. Freeman: I am getting on with it. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not want to listen to what I have to say. The chief veterinary officer said:

"I can confirm, from memory, that the timed temperatures that we were then talking about that might have been incorporated into the protocol for an individual plant would not have been sufficient to destroy the agent for scrapie or BSE."

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, who was a Minister at the time, should have known that. The charge is entirely without foundation.

The second charge is more serious. It relates to the failure of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and the Labour party to condemn the ban on the export of beef and support the non co-operation movement. The hon. Gentleman sought to evade the point because he said in his press release of 22 March on the ban imposed by France:

"Instead of talking about the French Government acting illegally by halting imports of beef and cattle from the UK, Agriculture Minister Douglas Hogg should understand that they were acting prudently."

[Mr. Freeman]

The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. There was no difference between the action of the French Government and the inevitable action of the European Union, because its ban was based on the individual national bans. The Labour party failed to condemn the ban and failed to support the Government's policy of non-co-operation. Who stands up better for Britain's interests?

The Labour party wants to be at the heart of Europe, but it would sell out British interests to suit its narrow party advantage. The Government promptly condemned the French action: the Opposition accepted it, and it led inevitably to the European Union ban.

Mr. Prescott: Rubbish.

Mr. Freeman: It is not rubbish, it is true.

The third charge against the Opposition is by far the most serious. I do not see the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) in her place tonight. After the measured statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Lady, in a hysterical and shrill response, said:

"Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that public confidence on this issue is hanging by a thread?"—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1996; Vol. 274, c. 376.]

She helped to snap it. I invite the House to read her response.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) spoke a few moments ago and suggested that if there had been an offer of co-operation from the Government, the opposition from the Labour party since March last year would have been more muted. The response of the hon. Member for Peckham was immediate and wrong and she must bear a heavy responsibility for having precipitated the crisis.

The Labour party must also accept responsibility. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee recommended on 20 March 1996 that meat from cattle over the age of 30 months should be deboned. Within eight days, we had moved, because of the hysterical reaction of the media and the irresponsible statements of some politicians, to implement the most expensive scheme for culling cattle over the age of 30 months. That is what cost £3.3 billion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) was right when he singled out the *Daily Mirror* for criticism. On 20 March, it reported:

"We've already eaten 1,000,000 mad cows".

It said that the Government were going to admit that eating mad cows could kill. That is sheer irresponsibility from that Labour newspaper. This is the first debate on BSE when the NFU has not been here to lobby the Government. The Labour party has lost the argument and has taken narrow political advantage of the crisis. It should be ashamed of itself.

Mr. Faulds: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. No reference in this House can be made either to the visitors or to the Press Gallery.

Madam Speaker: Order. Then I would expect the hon. Gentleman's colleagues not to point at or to refer to them.

Mr. Freeman: This motion is a stunt and the Labour party deserves to lose it.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 320.

Division No. 77] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Davis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*

Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Sir Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Sir Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett–Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox–Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McNair–Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin and
Mr. Roger Knapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (9) (European Standing Committees),

RAW TOBACCO

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5217/97, relating to the organisation of the market in raw tobacco, and supports the Government's policy, in the face of opposition from certain other Member States, to seek the removal of support from the tobacco sector.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it not normal for the Leader of the Opposition to be present for a vote of censure on a Cabinet Minister? Is it not an admission by the Leader of the Opposition that the Labour party is embarrassed by the fact that they have tabled the motion and that they have done yet further damage to the beef—

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is trying to prolong the debate. I do not know whether or not the Leader of the Opposition has been present—that is not my business.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

TAKEOVER BIDS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 5147/96, relating to company law on takeover bids, and agrees with the Government's view that a Directive would put at risk the advantages offered by the United Kingdom's present non-statutory system of takeover control without bringing compensating advantages and should therefore be opposed.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

ROAD TRAFFIC REDUCTION BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Road Traffic Reduction Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State under or by virtue of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

BRITISH NATIONALITY (HONG KONG) BILL *[LORDS] [MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any administrative expenses of the Secretary of State under the Act.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

Theory Test Centre (Huddersfield)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

10.17 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Perhaps I might prolong the previous debate by pointing out that the Leader of the Opposition is not here because he is unable to take his defeat on the chin.

I am grateful to have this opportunity to raise an issue of concern to many of my constituents, especially to many younger people in my constituency. It is also something of a relief, in these frenetic days in the run-up to a general election, to be able to talk about a non party-political subject. I am pleased to see my parliamentary neighbour, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), in his place. It is fair to say that he and I are united in our desire to have a theory test centre established in Huddersfield. I have sent my hon. Friend the Minister a copy of my speech so as to give him an opportunity to prepare a response to some of the points that I shall raise tonight.

I must confess that I was never over-enthusiastic about the introduction of a theory test in addition to the practical driving test, but I acknowledge the arguments in favour of it. In particular, I am aware that drivers in the 17-to-21 age group—that includes most new drivers—constitute 10 per cent. of licence holders, who are involved in 20 per cent. of accidents and suffer 25 per cent. of fatalities.

This country has a better record on road safety, and fewer deaths on the roads per head of population, than—I think—any other European Union country, but I know that the Government are striving to improve that excellent record still further. Clearly any measure that could improve the safety record of younger drivers needs to be considered seriously, and I very much hope that the new theory test will contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of road safety.

Now that the House has cleared a little, I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), the former Transport Minister, is present. I welcome him to the debate.

Test centres have been established in towns and cities throughout the country where the theory test can be taken by candidates. Unfortunately, no test centre was sited in Huddersfield, which means that all my constituents and those of the hon. Member for Huddersfield must travel to Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield or even Oldham. That is proving extremely inconvenient, and I am receiving a growing number of complaints from constituents.

Since the Driving Standards Agency has made the test more difficult to pass, the number of people who must travel a second time to one of the test centres has increased. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to instruct the DSA to inform candidates who fail of the marks that they received and the questions on which they failed, so that they know which areas of knowledge they need to improve.

I know one lady who missed her test because she was caught in traffic jams caused by road works. One of the driving instructors in Huddersfield told me about a pregnant lady who took over three hours to do the round trip, although she lived only 10 miles from the main bus station in Huddersfield. There is currently no train service

[Mr. Graham Riddick]

to Bradford, although I welcome the Government's recent announcement of an investment of over £3 million to create a rail link between Huddersfield and Bradford. Those living in rural areas south of Huddersfield—for instance, Colne valley and Holme valley—face an even more tortuous journey, especially if they do not have their own transport.

Driving instructors in Huddersfield are now becoming quite vehement in their condemnation of the lack of a theory test centre in Huddersfield. So are local people. More than 5,000 have signed a petition calling for a centre in Huddersfield, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to give serious consideration to that important demonstration of public opinion.

I first raised the matter with my hon. Friend last summer, and I have had on-going correspondence with him since then. As my hon. Friend knows, I have also bent his ear on a number of occasions—as I am doing again tonight. In one of his letters to me, he wrote:

"For an additional test centre to be sited in Huddersfield, a robust case would need to demonstrate that special circumstances or difficulties applied in the case of Huddersfield."

I intend to demonstrate that special circumstances and difficulties indeed exist, and I hope that that persuades the Minister that we need a theory test centre.

The specification for theory test centre locations is that a test centre should be available within 5 miles where the population density is greater than 1,250 people per sq km. Huddersfield, which is one of the biggest towns in England—some say that it is the biggest—has a population of around 150,000; it certainly has a population density greater than 1,250 people per sq km. The problem is that the DSA has taken administrative districts as the yardstick by which to judge population density.

Huddersfield is within the metropolitan district of Kirklees. The population density of Kirklees is 935 people per sq km, which is still very high, but lower than the specified figure of 1,250. Kirklees is a totally artificial creation, which came about in the 1974 local government reorganisation. No one desired it then and, even now, it is regarded by many—myself included—as an unwieldy and over-large council because it takes in Huddersfield and the surrounding towns and villages to the south on one hand and Batley and Dewsbury to the north of Huddersfield on the other. I would argue that there is very little synergy between the two parts. In addition, Kirklees includes a large rural area, which dilutes the population density.

My constituents are therefore suffering as a result of living in part of the area of the over-large Kirklees council. Kirklees is actually the seventh largest council in the country—a fact that not many people know. Only Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford, Liverpool and Manchester councils are bigger, and there is a theory test centre situated in all of those places. No such luck in Kirklees yet.

My constituents are suffering because of the unusual geographical nature of the administrative district of Kirklees. They are suffering because of an administrative quirk. Those of my constituents who live in the outlying areas of Kirklees and the Colne valley must travel through Huddersfield to reach theory test centres in Leeds or Bradford.

I shall consider a specific example. In my constituency, there is a town called Holmfirth, made famous by Compo and friends in that television series, "Last of the Summer Wine." Incidentally, I see no sign that Compo has ever passed a theory driving test—or, for that matter, a practical driving test.

Holmfirth lies about six miles south of Huddersfield and has a population of roughly 18,000. The House of Commons Library has estimated for me that Holmfirth is 24 miles from Leeds, 26.5 miles from Bradford and 21 miles from Sheffield. The only theory test centre within 20 miles of Holmfirth is in Oldham.

My hon. Friend the Minister, representing a London constituency as he does, might not understand this, but to most of my constituents in Holmfirth, Oldham is in a different world because it lies in Lancashire. Moreover, there is a great obstacle between Holmfirth and Oldham—the Pennine hills. Bus services to Oldham are irregular from Holmfirth and the main Holmfirth to Oldham road is regularly cut off during the winter by snow because it is one of the highest roads in the country.

In practice, therefore, the majority of my Holmfirth constituents travel to Leeds, Bradford or Sheffield for their theory tests. From Holmfirth, all those test centres are outside the 20-mile limit. The inconvenience to my Holme valley constituents is significant.

The Department of Transport recently agreed to site a theory test centre in Doncaster. I am happy about that, but one glance at a map will show that Huddersfield is a larger town than Doncaster. The population of Doncaster is 505 people per sq km, which is almost half that of Kirklees and perhaps a quarter that of the town of Huddersfield.

I believe that one of the deciding factors in favour of Doncaster was the volume of practical driving tests taking place—between 150 and 200 per week. That is almost identical to the number of practical tests that have been taken in Huddersfield each week.

I notice that a host of towns with smaller populations than Huddersfield already have test centres: Basingstoke, Chelmsford, Chester, Colchester, Dunfermline, Greenock, Guildford, Harrogate, Merthyr Tydfil, Taunton, Yeovil—I could go on. I repeat, Huddersfield is being discriminated against simply because of an administrative quirk.

The cost of setting up a new theory test centre is not enormous. In comparison, however, the cost to my constituents of having to travel to Leeds or Bradford is substantial, and I do not believe justifiable, considering the strong case for a test centre in Huddersfield. Several venues in Huddersfield have been suggested to me as being available for a theory test centre. One of the driving instructors suggested that, if necessary, the contractors to the DSA could use a travelling bus in which people could sit the test. I do not believe that that is necessary. There is apparently a room available at Waverley house in Huddersfield, where people have to go now to take their practical driving test.

In conclusion, I quote my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest who, as I pointed out earlier, was until recently the Minister for Transport with responsibility for these matters. In a debate on the same subject initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks), the then Minister said that frequent tests would be run "to meet candidates' needs." In an earlier Adjournment debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), the same Minister said that

"we want the test centres to be accessible."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1996; Vol. 269, c. 705.]

It would appear, therefore, that the Department wants to be helpful and co-operative to those people taking the tests.

I hope that I have demonstrated to my hon. Friend the current Minister that there are serious problems for many of my constituents at present. The test centres to which they have to travel are not sufficiently accessible. It is only because of an administrative quirk that that anomaly has been created.

I urge my hon. Friend to site a theory test centre in Huddersfield. It will improve the quality of life for my constituents, especially my younger constituents, who obviously make up the majority of those taking their driving tests. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to respond positively to what I have said.

10.30 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and I do not agree on much, but we certainly agree on this. He has outlined well the problem that we face in Huddersfield. Ours is an area of valleys, whose contours make travel extremely difficult. A civil servant in London looking at the map might not understand the difficulties of travelling up one valley and down another.

Many of my constituents find that a 20-minute test takes half a day out of their work; sometimes they lose a day's work. That is a considerable penalty to pay for taking a theory test.

The Minister will know of my great interest over the years in transport safety. I warmly supported the introduction of the theory test. When the former Minister of Transport, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), was in office, I pushed hard for a more sophisticated interactive test, which unfortunately did not come about, but perhaps it will one day.

The theory test is good for safety and it is good for most of the young people who must take it. It is good for all of us to undergo retesting, and to take the advanced drivers test, as I did recently.

The hon. Gentleman and I differ about Kirklees, which is a large metropolitan borough and an energetic one. It wins prizes for being one of the best local authorities in the country. It wins competitive bids from the Department of the Environment. It is an example that everyone except the hon. Gentleman seems to admire. It produces a great deal of wealth, income and investment into the town. One has only to think of the McAlpine stadium and our new theatre, the Lawrence Batley theatre, to understand that.

We should listen not just to those who have to take the test—they are a transient population, and after they get over their difficulties, they forget, but we get letters from their parents. We also have a well organised core of driving instructors. One of my constituents by the name of Jackson is active in leading an effective campaign. I can tell the Minister that neither he, the hon. Gentleman or I will go away until we get a test centre for Huddersfield. It is an important priority in the area, and I hope that the Minister will listen to what we say.

Finally, my very good friend Compo, otherwise known as Bill Owen, is a great supporter of the Labour party, although he sometimes feels that it is a little centrist for him these days. He has a licence, but no longer deems it fit for him to drive on the congested roads of Britain today.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Colne Valley for giving me an opportunity to intrude on his Adjournment debate. I hope that our joint efforts will bring about the right solution soon.

10.34 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. John Bowis): This seems to be the Compo debate—all I can say is that I bet Nora Batty votes Conservative. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) on his consistent and persistent work on behalf of his constituents regarding the theory test centre, and on gaining all-party support in the form of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). I welcome this opportunity to reassure my hon. Friend about the arrangements in the Huddersfield area. Let me first give the background to the matter, which is the introduction of the new theory test—the biggest and most important change to the driving test since its introduction 60 years ago.

On 1 July last year, a new separate theory test was introduced that learner drivers must pass, in addition to the familiar on-road practical driving test, before they can obtain a full driving licence. The introduction of the new theory test has been widely welcomed by motoring and road safety organisations, and I believe that it will make a significant contribution to improving road safety and reducing the accident rate among newly qualified drivers—particularly among 17 to 21-year-olds who represent some 10 per cent. of licence holders, but who are involved in 20 per cent. of accidents and about a quarter of fatalities. I know that those figures were very much in the mind of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) when he introduced the test.

The current test is in a pencil-and-paper multiple choice format. A research project is currently being undertaken—using the latest IT-based technology—to develop ways of validly testing a learner driver's ability to recognise and deal appropriately with hazards. We intend to introduce a second generation IT-based theory test within the next few years.

We shall be monitoring the effect of the new test carefully during its first five years and evaluating it to make sure that it is achieving the desired effect of reducing accidents. The theory test lasts for about 40 minutes and, for cars and motor cycles, it consists of 35 questions. Motor cyclists have their own version of the test, with some questions specific to motor cycling. Separate theory tests for learner drivers of lorries, buses and coaches were introduced on 2 January this year.

The normal arrangement is that learner drivers must pass a theory test before they are able to book a practical test. However, during the first six months between 1 July and 31 December 1996, there was a special arrangement to allow test candidates to take the practical test first. To gain a full driving licence, test candidates then needed to take the theory test within the following six months. Those measures helped to avoid a bottleneck of candidates who could not book practical tests because they had not passed their theory tests. They also helped with the management of the surge in demand for theory

[Mr. John Bowis]

tests following their introduction. A similar transition period for lorry and bus theory tests operates for six months from 2 January to 30 June.

Whatever order they are taken in, learner drivers must pass both the theory and the practical tests before they can drive on the roads unaccompanied and before they can be issued with a full driving licence. The pass rate for the theory test for cars and motor cycles is currently about 61 per cent. I am pleased to be able to respond to one of the points that my hon. Friend raised by telling him that, as an additional service and in order to help candidates, from 1 March we will tell candidates the mark that they achieved in the test. Those who fail will be told the topic areas in which they gave incorrect answers, thus assisting them to prepare for their next attempt.

The specification for the establishment of theory test centres was based on responses to the Driving Standards Agency's customer surveys. Driving test candidates and their instructors said that they thought it was reasonable to travel up to 20 miles for a driving test. A national network of theory test centres was developed, which runs frequent test sessions to meet candidates' needs. The specification for theory test centre locations requires that a test centre should be available within a radius of 20 miles for most people, and in administrative districts—usually towns or cities—where the population density is higher, a test centre should be available within a radius of about five miles. In more sparsely populated areas with a low population density, a test centre should be available within a radius of 40 miles.

As my honourable Friend said, I have received his representations concerning the location of theory test centres. Following receipt of his inquiries, I looked into the matter and confirmed that the network of theory test centres did not include siting a theory test centre in Huddersfield.

Huddersfield is located in an administrative district, Kirklees, with a population density of 935 people per sq km, which requires there to be a theory test centre within 20 miles. Test centres at Leeds, Bradford and Oldham are within that radius and serve candidates in the Huddersfield area accordingly, although I take my hon. Friend's point about the geography of the last and the winter road problem across the Pennines. Adequate public transport is available between Huddersfield and other centres. By road, Huddersfield is about 12 miles from Bradford, 15 miles from Leeds and about 20 miles from Oldham. Holmfirth, to which my hon. Friend also referred, is roughly 23 miles away by road from Leeds, about 19 miles from Bradford, 16 miles from Oldham and 23 miles from Sheffield.

The present plans reflect a realistic balance between costs, the travelling distances to centres for candidates and the frequency at which test sessions would be available. Most theory test centres currently operate at around only 25 per cent. to 30 per cent. of their total capacity. Leeds and Bradford are currently operating at a higher proportion.

Although I accept my hon. Friend's point about the inconvenience that can be caused to test candidates by delays due to road works, that would not constitute a strong case for siting an additional theory test centre in Huddersfield. Indeed, the same problems could arise at any time in any town. He also made quite a case for a theory test centre to be sited in Holmfirth, but I am not sure that Compo's needs quite swing it—with or without his ferrets. However, I recognise the strength of local concern that my hon. Friend expressed, and we have looked carefully at the information that he has given.

I have received similar representations from other parts of the country. In some instances, such as the Isle of Wight, where we had to avoid the need for candidates to make an expensive ferry journey, we have been able to make some concession.

I note my hon. Friend's statements regarding larger and smaller towns that have a theory test centre. However, it is important to re-emphasise that theory test centres were not sited based just on the populations of towns. To have done so would have risked poorer geographical coverage by the theory test centre network for people in more rural areas. I am, however, persuaded by his argument that Kirklees has a specific and special geography.

Among those districts with population densities that fell just below the threshold for a theory test centre to be located within five miles, Kirklees is the largest in terms of the area covered. A consequence is that, among such districts, Kirklees also has the largest population.

There are also the travelling difficulties to which my hon. Friend referred created by the district's situation on the Pennines. In the light of these factors, I have reviewed the provision of theory test centre facilities for the Kirklees district and have today instructed that an additional centre be established in Huddersfield.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 18 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time on Tuesday 25 February.

LEVER PARK BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Tuesday 25 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Smoking

1. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new initiatives he plans to take to draw attention to the damage to health caused by smoking. [14727]

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): Press, television and radio advertising are being used in support of a programme aimed at teenagers as well as the more general national smoking education campaign. Detailed arrangements for the final year of the campaign will be finalised shortly. Future activity will be developed in the light of the evaluation of the current campaigns.

Mr. Steen: Is my hon. Friend aware that non-smokers have absolutely no choice in public places but to inhale other people's smoke, whether in a railway coach or a restaurant? He might consider the Singapore experience, which has been very successful: little plastic see-through igloos are built in public places and are the sole place where smokers may smoke, and the public can look in and see who is puffing away.

Mr. Malone: Perhaps I can add to the list my hon. Friend gave of places where passive smoking is a problem the Strangers' Bar in this House, where otherwise politically correct Labour Members often inflict this problem on all of us. We will let that pass, however. The instance that my hon. Friend outlined has not been drawn to my attention before. While we are keen to reduce the incidence of passive smoking, my initial reaction is that I do not think that placing the public in the stocks as he suggests would be the best way forward.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister must be aware that the House would be a good place to introduce some pioneering activity in terms of non-smoking areas—sometimes the Palace seems to be suffused with smoke. Surely, both Members and staff could be educated a little better. On the more general point, there has been an interesting and encouraging decline in smoking, but in the last year of record, £69 million was spent on advertising tobacco alone. The advertisers are after young people and teenagers. They want to get them addicted early so that they will have them as slaves for the rest of their lives. When will the Government start to match that sort of advertising money?

Mr. Malone: If it is not the smokescreens put up by Opposition Members, it is when they are conflated with hot air that we occasionally have our greatest problems, and that is what the hon. Gentleman has done. The countries in the European Union that have been most successful in reducing smoking among their adult populations are the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, where there is no ban on tobacco advertising—but we are supported by a voluntary arrangement. Other EU countries, where there is a ban, have not been nearly as successful as this country. Our principle of voluntary restraint is working, should be supported and should continue.

Dame Jill Knight: Is my hon. Friend aware that while most smokers are knowledgeable about the dangers that they face from lung cancer and other cancers, few are aware of the severe danger that they face when they have to have anaesthetics for an operation, which can happen to any of us at any time? When he is considering publicity on the matter, will he also stress that point?

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend will know that, as research into such matters progresses, and as we develop both the voluntary code of conduct and the warnings that appear on cigarette packets and other forms of advertising, any lessons that can be learnt will be borne in mind. I shall take on board what she says. She underlines another point about not having a ban on advertising: it is important to draw warnings to the attention of the public in a consistent but evolving way, to fit the prevailing circumstances, and that can be done under a voluntary code of regulation through the advertising campaigns that are run in this country.

Mr. Barron: The Minister must know that the Government have failed to reach their "Health of the Nation" target and that teenage smoking has increased by 50 per cent. Why does he not take the obvious initiative and ban tobacco advertising? Will we have at the next general election the same situation as we had at the last, when a deal was done with Imperial Tobacco so that Tory posters replaced cigarette advertisements on billboards throughout the country? When the Royal College of Physicians tells us that, every day, 450 children start smoking, is not it time that the Conservatives put the health of the public before the health of their party?

Mr. Malone: What a lot of sanctimonious claptrap. The hon. Gentleman would do better to base his case on the facts rather than on that sort of argument. The facts are simply that all the research shows that the one sure way to discourage smoking is to increase the price of tobacco, which is what the Government have done through the tax system. Tobacco in this country is more

expensive than in any of our European partner countries. That is the true way to ensure that there is a reduction in smoking.

The hon. Gentleman is keen to anticipate failure where none has occurred. There were four "Health of the Nation" targets set out for 2000; we are making sound and solid progress on three, and not as much progress as we would like on the fourth; but that makes us determined to redouble our efforts, rather than resort to the nonsense that the hon. Gentleman was talking about.

Mr. Bill Walker: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the huge amount of tax paid by smokers? As a non-smoker, I am delighted that they pay that tax, because otherwise I and others like me, who have never smoked, would be required to fill the gap in funding. One wonders where Opposition Members expect to find the funds.

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is right to say that smokers make an important contribution to revenue, but the Government's policy is underpinned by the fact that, while of course an increase in price raises extra revenue, it also fulfils the basic purpose of reducing tobacco consumption.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

2. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a no-fault liability compensation scheme for those victims of Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease caused by human-derived growth hormone and bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [14728]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): The human growth hormone treatment programme was the subject of legal action, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, and we accepted the judgment that was delivered in July 1996.

Any future claim for compensation for other people who have contracted CJD, however that may have come about, will be considered within the context of the Government's statutory obligations.

Mr. Illsley: As the Minister rightly points out, the Government were found negligent in the High Court in respect of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease cases caused by the prescription of human growth hormone. As he will know, 22 victims have already died and far more are living with the terror that they might contract the disease as a result of the treatment, and that they might have to face the disease without any prospect of compensation.

Likewise, CJD victims from BSE are not being compensated, yet the Government have conceded an economic case for BSE compensation to the tune of £1 billion for farmers. Surely it is time to stop the endless litigation and bring in a no-fault liability scheme for the victims, who have contracted this terrible disease as a result of Government negligence, and their families.

Mr. Horam: Like the whole House, I am enormously sympathetic not only to those who have contracted CJD, whatever the cause, and their families, but to those who are worried but well and do not know whether they will be affected by this terrible disease. The problem from our point of view is simply that it must be the first and overriding responsibility of the Department of Health to concentrate on preventing ill health and curing it when it occurs, not on compensating those who have contracted that terrible problem. We acknowledge our responsibilities where negligence is clearly proven, and we shall continue to do so.

Mr. Fabricant: Notwithstanding the terrible tragedy of people contracting Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease through the injection of growth hormone, will the Minister put the issue in perspective by confirming that only 15 people have contracted the disease through the consumption of beef?

Mr. Horam: So far, the figures suggest that 15 people have contracted the new variant of CJD, although there is no scientific evidence on the connection between BSE and CJD. The numbers are small. As the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) said, we must be concerned with not only those who have contracted the disease but, in cases involving human growth hormone, those who may contract it in future. Some of those people will receive compensation under the judgment that has been delivered. The families concerned are appealing against part of the judgment and, if they are successful, that may extend the scope of compensation.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: Will the Minister consider the perspective of people such as my constituent, Edward Gray, who have been treated with human growth hormone and face years of stress and worry about whether they will contract this dreadful disease? Would it not be a kindness to introduce a no-fault system for such people as well as for those who have contracted it? That would at least reduce that aspect of the stress and worry associated with the disease.

Mr. Horam: It is tragic that a treatment that for 25 years appeared to offer people of low stature a chance to reach normal height has developed a terrible side effect. However, the Health Department's first priority must be to cure health problems, not to compensate those who, however sadly, die from or contract this disease. None the less, we will consider cases of negligence most sympathetically. We have followed up the court case quickly. I assure the hon. Lady that we will continue to do that.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend resist absolutely the accusation of the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), whom I normally respect, that this problem has come about through Government negligence? The debate yesterday made it clear that that is not the case. People who suggest it are attempting to use politics to bring out the sympathy that we all have for people with the disease. It is not a question of political negligence. The Department of Health will do everything possible to assist those who may be affected by the disease.

Mr. Horam: Indeed. As my right hon. Friend knows, that is why we have given funds to the CJD support network. We are conducting research, and we have set up—and support—a counselling service that operates from Great Ormond Street hospital. On research and health, as my right hon. Friend rightly said, we are

committed to giving all the support that we can. However, we do not feel that we can go further and introduce a no-fault compensation scheme, which would be expensive and detract directly from funds for health care.

Breast Cancer

3. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on breast cancer mortality rates in (a) Britain and (b) other European Union countries. [14729]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): Breast cancer mortality rates in the United Kingdom fell by 6.5 per cent. between 1986 and 1992. They have been falling at a faster rate than the European Union average. That demonstrates the continuing success of the action that we are taking, which includes the "Health of the Nation" targets, the national breast cancer screening service and the issuing of specific guidance on improving outcomes in breast cancer.

Ms Church: I thank the Minister for his answer. While we welcome some of the modest improvements that have been made, 35 women a day—13,000 a year—die from breast cancer. Those are not cold statistics; people's lives are being adversely affected, families are being destroyed, and young children are being left without mothers. Does the Minister accept that there are huge regional variations in how people are treated, which means that there is a lottery for treatment? What steps will the Government take to ensure that early detection occurs in all parts of the country and that treatment is successful?

Mr. Burns: I assure the hon. Lady categorically that the Government take the problem very seriously. That is why we introduced the national breast screening programme. I do not accept that treatment is a lottery. The role of the national health service is to provide the same high-quality care for every patient who suffers from that tragic illness. We shall continue to ensure that that occurs through the screening programme, the guidelines on outcomes and through medical decisions and care.

Mr. Rowe: The Government deserve considerable congratulations on their successes so far and on their continuing efforts to improve the situation, but will my hon. Friend examine the extraordinary imbalance between the funds made available for the important breast cancer campaign and those made available for prostate cancer, which kills an increasing number of men every year?

Mr. Burns: As my hon. Friend will know, this year the Government are making £25 million available for cancer research, the pharmaceutical companies are making £114 million available, and the charities are making £100 million available. That is a considerable amount of money devoted to research into all types of cancer. It is crucial that research continues in order to minimise the number of deaths and illnesses caused by that tragic condition.

Ms Jowell: Last year, the Secretary of State asserted in the House:

"To talk about a waiting list for cancer surgery is to talk about a waiting list that does not exist".—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1996; Vol. 286, c. 784.]

Will the Minister tell the House how he squares that claim with figures provided by his Department that show that more than 10,000 women had to wait more than two weeks for breast cancer surgery in 1994–95?

Mr. Burns: Notwithstanding the fact that we are in the run-up to a general election, I think that it is unfortunate for any politician to try to score cheap party political points on cancer care.

Ms Jowell: Answer the question.

Mr. Burns: I shall answer the question if the hon. Lady will listen. She knows that the Labour party's commitment is bogus because no one waits for cancer treatment unless the doctor makes a clinical decision to that effect. There are times when cancer patients are not medically able to undergo an operation. To talk of a waiting list in the terms that the hon. Lady uses is scaremongering and despicable.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the Government's excellent record on tackling cancer. Will he join me in paying tribute to the Cancer Research Institute and to the Royal Marsden hospital in my constituency, which have contributed considerably to that success? Will he also encourage women to take advantage of breast screening opportunities so that the success may continue?

Mr. Burns: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for the constructive way in which she asks her question. I pay full tribute to the contribution of all charities and of the pharmaceutical companies, which do much good work in seeking to reduce and minimise the evils of cancer. I pay tribute also to the Royal Marsden hospital and to the fantastic work done by nurses and doctors in an attempt to eliminate that terrible source of suffering.

Mental Health Services

4. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the Association of Directors of Social Services to discuss services for mentally ill people. [14730]

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I last met the Association of Directors of Social Services informally on 4 February. Services for mentally ill people were among the issues discussed at that meeting.

Mr. Barnes: Is the Secretary of State aware that emotional and conduct disorders affect 20 per cent. of adolescents, and that in 1995 a NHS advisory service survey showed that mental health provision for children and adolescents was patchy and inadequate? Why did he not confront that problem in his recent Green Paper and advance proposals for handling the difficulties that children and adolescents face?

Mr. Dorrell: I have never believed that those who are concerned about mental health problems serve their interests by inflating the number of people who suffer from mental illness. Some people suffer from acute and serious mental illness, and we need to improve the quality of service provision for them. That is why the resources

committed last year to improving mental health services totalled £90 million, why a further £50 million was allocated in this year's public expenditure survey settlement to expand mental health services in the next financial year, and why we are looking to health and social services departments to expand their provision using the extra money that the Government are providing.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the increase in the provision of medium-secure beds from none in 1979 to nearly 1,200 today is evidence of the Government's real commitment of resources to those who suffer from mental illness?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is on to a very important point. Medium-secure bed provision is an important part of the total spectrum of care in mental health services. The need for identifiable medium-secure mental health beds was described by the Glancy committee in 1974; Labour in office did absolutely nothing about it, but this Government have delivered the total number of beds that Glancy—too many years ago—determined was necessary.

Ms Coffey: In view of the recent reports of problems at Broadmoor, is the Secretary of State satisfied that the commissioning and monitoring arrangements established with the high-security psychiatric commissioning board are adequate to ensure proper inspection of care and control in special hospitals? Will he agree to widen the terms of the inquiry into Ashworth to enable the inquiry team to examine the adequacy of current arrangements for inspections of all three special hospitals and to make recommendations?

Mr. Dorrell: No. The Fallon inquiry into Ashworth was set up to examine the background to a very precise set of circumstances that need to be properly examined. When I set up the inquiry, I made it very clear that Mr. Fallon would be free to follow up any linkages with the failures that occurred in the personality disorder unit at Ashworth—either linkages to the rest of the hospital or linkages to places outside Ashworth hospital. Clearly, if they lead to Broadmoor, Mr. Fallon is free to follow up such linkages, but at the moment there is no evidence of any such linkage.

Sir Roger Sims: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a distinction to be drawn between mentally ill people, who are normally the responsibility of health authorities, and people with learning disabilities, the services for whom lie within the ambit both of local authorities and of health authorities? Is not that an area that lends itself to joint commissioning? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the London borough of Bromley, plans are currently under consultation for just such joint commissioning of services? Will he commend that and suggest that others might follow suit?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to say that social services departments and health authorities have a key role to play in the delivery of services to mentally ill people and people suffering from a learning disability. The Green Paper that the Government published two weeks ago is designed precisely to improve the linkage between health and social services in the delivery of services to mentally ill people—a weakness that certainly needs to be addressed. Various options for strengthening the linkages between health and social services are canvassed in the Green Paper; one of those options will be followed up, because it provides the key to an important improvement in mental health care.

Cancelled Operations (Northern and Yorkshire)

5. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the annual change in the number of patients in the Northern and Yorkshire region who have had operations cancelled on the day they were due to go into hospital or after admission since 1994–95. [14731]

Mr. Dorrell: Between 1994–95 and 1995–96, cancelled operations in the Northern and Yorkshire region increased by 14.8 per cent. The most recent information for the current year shows a fall in cancelled operations of 25 per cent.

Mr. Mudie: The Minister will confirm to the House that, under the patients charter, cancellations of operations on the day of admission should not happen at all, yet he has confirmed an increase of 14 per cent., which means 830 additional cases and brings the total in the past year to more than 6,613 cancellations. How does he explain those figures to the House? In view of the distress that cancellations cause to patients and their relatives, will he take this opportunity to apologise to those patients on behalf of his Department? Will he pledge that there will be no cancellations in the coming financial year?

Mr. Dorrell: No Health Minister can pledge that there will be no cancellations. The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), on the Opposition Front Bench, could not make that commitment and it would be absurd if he tried to do so. The hon. Gentleman did not listen to my answer. He had the opportunity to congratulate the health service in the Northern and Yorkshire region on the 25 per cent. reduction in cancelled operations in the current year.

I have even better news for the hon. Gentleman and his constituents in Leeds. In the current year, the number of operations that were cancelled there fell by more than half. The hon. Gentleman might have taken time off to congratulate those who are responsible for delivering health care to his constituents on the improved service that they are delivering in the current year. I look forward to his having the opportunity to remedy that failure.

Mr. Sykes: Will my right hon. Friend ignore the claptrap from the Opposition Benches? Will he remind people in the country, and the House, of the distress that was caused by union members and Labour party members who picketed hospitals in 1979?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that the Labour party, with its close links with the trade union movement, must bear its responsibility for the failures in health care that typified the winter of 1978–79 and the period before that. It is worth reflecting that, although cancelled operations account for roughly 1 per cent. of people coming off the waiting list, the number of operations that are cancelled because the patient does

not show up at hospital corresponds to roughly 5 per cent. of the total. It is worth bearing that figure in mind when reflecting on the number of cancelled operations.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Secretary of State be less aggressive and more apologetic about the figures that are the answer to this question? The answer that the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), gave me last month showed that, in the Northern and Yorkshire region, there were 1,200 cancellations on the day of admission or after, and 75 which failed the citizens charter standard. In my area, the corresponding figures were 350 and 75. Nationally, there were 50,000 cancellations and 6,000 cancellations that failed the citizens charter standard for readmission within one month of the original date.

What will the Secretary of State say to the family of Queenie Harrild, who died in Guy's hospital and whose inquest is this week, when the citizens charter is regularly breached and thousands of patients continue to be admitted to hospital and then sent home, some of whom die before their operation?

Mr. Dorrell: To an individual patient, if the service fails, of course I express regret. I have never pretended that any human institution can deliver a perfect service. However, when we talk about the cancelled operations record of the national health service, let us start by remembering that when the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) held the job now held by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, she predicted that there would be 300,000 cancelled operations in the national health service last year. The actual figure was not 300,000 but 54,000, and in all but 6,000 of those cases the patient was then operated on within a month.

That is the record of the national health service—against the background of 5.5 million people being taken off the waiting list every year to receive the care that they need in our health service. The hon. Gentleman might do better to report those figures more often.

Mr. Batiste: The drop of more than 50 per cent. in operation cancellations in Leeds is extremely good news. Can my right hon. Friend give some idea of why that outstanding performance has been achieved this year? Does it owe something to the improving quality of management, which is always subject to criticism and attack from the Labour party?

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is nice that he, at least, can welcome that improvement in the health care delivered to the people of Leeds on behalf of the people of Leeds.

My hon. Friend asks why the improvement has been brought about. I suggest that there are two reasons. First, the health service is better managed than it used to be; secondly, the Conservative Government are committed to the growth of the national health service—as the Prime Minister said at last year's Conservative party conference, real growth, which has happened every year since 1979, will happen year on year on year on year on year through the five years of the next Parliament. I wish the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury well in his negotiations with the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Chris Smith: Is not the reality that patient after patient in hospital after hospital is having his or her operation cancelled, frequently just before or just after going into hospital? Is not the real position, which the people of this country know, very different from the Government's rosy version of events?

When hospital trusts talk openly about the judicious elimination of numbers of patients due to go in for operations, does not that show that the Government are fiddling the figures? Is not the truth that no one can trust the Tories with the health service?

Mr. Dorrell: The answer to every one of the hon. Gentleman's questions is no. His problem is that he has not been able to secure the backing of his Front Bench for a commitment to a growing health service.

Let me give the hon. Gentleman some other statistics that measure the growth of the health service under the present Government. Because we are committed to extra resources for a growing health service, I was able to announce increases in intensive care provision in the NHS. Over the past five years, the number of places for day surgery has roughly doubled. That is why, under this Government, the number of patients treated has increased by a third in the last six years. That is a record to which the hon. Gentleman cannot begin to measure up, because his hon. Friends will not allow him to make the pledge to a growing health service that the Prime Minister has made.

Sir Donald Thompson: Is it not a fact that Northern and Yorkshire health authority is one of the best in Europe, and are not the Labour party's politically motivated attacks on the health service now leading directly—it is Labour's responsibility—to difficulties in the recruitment of nurses and other hospital staff?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Along with the rest of the health service, Northern and Yorkshire health authority is treating more patients, and offering a broader range and better quality of care than ever before in its history.

The original question was asked by the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie). A Leeds Member might have been expected to welcome the fact that in the past 15 years—quite apart from a growing current health service budget in Leeds—we have invested an extra £130 million in improving hospital structures in the city. We are committed to increasing the capital stock of the health service in future through the private finance initiative—which the hon. Gentleman will not back—and to a growth in the number of patients who are treated. We are committed to growth; the Labour party is not.

Postponed Operations (Wolverhampton)

6. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many surgical operations were postponed in Wolverhampton during 1996; and if he will make a statement. [14732]

Mr. Horam: In the nine months to September 1996, 216 operations were cancelled in Wolverhampton on the day of admission or after admission to hospital.

Mr. Purchase: I thank the Minister for that information. The list of cancelled operations in Wolverhampton has fallen slightly over the last 12 months.

I am ecstatic for every one of my constituents who is treated properly, and in accordance with the citizens charter; but I am miserable beyond belief for the 350 or so whose operations are cancelled at the last minute. May I put the matter into a regional context, and tell the Minister that there has been an 18 per cent. growth in the number of operations cancelled at the last minute in the west midlands? May I extrapolate, and point out that across the regions of England and Wales that would have meant some 60,000 people waiting, in misery and anxiety, for further appointments after the cancellation of their original appointments? Does the Minister understand the anxiety, misery and worry that is being caused?

Mr. Horam: I do indeed understand the misery and worry experienced by the hon. Gentleman's constituents—and, indeed, by everyone who must face the prospect of a cancelled operation. That is why I, too, am delighted that, as in Leeds, the figures have fallen over the past few months. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State dealt with that at some length, and I shall not add any further statistics; but we are all delighted that we are making such progress.

Organophosphates

7. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) evaluated on the effects of organophosphate toxicity upon humans; and if he will make a statement. [14733]

Mr. Malone: We have awarded a research contract to the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh worth £500,000 to examine the possible long-term human effects of organophosphorous sheep dips.

My officials routinely obtain and evaluate papers in scientific journals that appear relevant to the effects of OPs upon humans. The medical and scientific panel, which is a sub-committee of the veterinary products committee, evaluates research on OPs used in veterinary medicines.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that answer, but is it not complacent? For at least 15 years, those drugs have been known to be dangerous, but the Government are no further down the line. If the veterinary committee was not shot through with vested interests, perhaps we would get results sooner.

Mr. Malone: That is an unworthy allegation and, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman would probably wish to withdraw it. I do not know how he and the Opposition would wish the Government to proceed, other than on the basis of the best available scientific evidence. I am sorry that he has decided to criticise the committee in that way. The Government have always accepted recommendations to carry out research. We also carefully consider relabelling products, where that is necessary. The hon. Gentleman is marching down the same road as the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who is reported today in the press as saying that Labour has said, despite the evidence, that if it wins the election, it will tell farmers to avoid using the dips on safety grounds. That is a disgraceful failure to recognise the available evidence. The hon. Member for Oldham, West is moving down a track pioneered by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), and we saw what results that brought about.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Has my hon. Friend seen the written answer that I received yesterday on the subject? It states that the veterinary products committee has examined the matter carefully and found no scientific justification, on present evidence, for withdrawing the dips from the market.

Mr. Malone: My hon. Friend is right, and she will disappoint all those in the House who prefer to proceed not on the basis of the scientific evidence that is made available to Ministers, but on some other, politically motivated basis. My right hon. Friend's answer yesterday was based on the professional and scientific advice that he received. The Government will continue to examine all such advice and, if necessary, we will change our procedures accordingly.

Frail Elderly People

8. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of NHS beds for frail elderly people in 2000. [14734]

Mr. Burns: The Government do not produce forecasts of the number of beds, although the number of geriatric cases treated rose by 19 per cent. between 1990–91 and 1995–96.

Mr. Canavan: What does the Minister have to say about a health board or health authority with a projected population of more than 40,000 elderly people by the year 2000, which plans to reduce the number of national health service beds for frail elderly people to a mere 160, which means that there will be an NHS bed for less than 0.4 per cent. of the elderly population? Would it not be a gross betrayal of the very generation of people who built our national health service if the Government were to deprive them of an NHS bed at their time of need?

Mr. Burns: I genuinely do not want to be unhelpful to the hon. Gentleman, but I assume that he is referring to Lochgreen hospital in his constituency. He will appreciate that he should raise the issue with—

Mr. Canavan: Answer the question.

Mr. Burns: I will in a minute. The narrow issue behind the hon. Gentleman's question should be raised with the

Minister of State, Scottish Office, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton). On the wider question of beds for residential and nursing care in England and the United Kingdom, the hon. Gentleman seems to forget that, in the past five years or so, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of beds in such homes.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that various illnesses are associated with aging, and that, with the number of geriatric beds available, there is a difficulty in accommodating such people in the NHS? Is it not necessary to re-examine the number of beds for those with aging illnesses, so that they do not have to be accommodated in private nursing homes?

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he will be aware, the decision to discharge anyone—elderly or otherwise—from hospital is a clinical decision, with back-up care provided, if needed, after they have left hospital. I am sure that he will welcome the noticeable increase in the number of nursing home beds as well as convalescent homes and halfway house wards for people who may need additional care after they have been treated in a hospital.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

9. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of St. Bartholomew's hospital. [14735]

Mr. Dorrell: The Royal Hospitals NHS trust is carrying out the decisions that my predecessor announced on 4 April 1995.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why close St. Bartholomew's hospital when the people of London want to keep it open? Why close an institution that opened in 1123, which has been open for 874 years, and which survived the reformation, the great fire of London and Hitler's bombing of London? Yet now it is to be closed by the Tory Government.

Mr. Dorrell: Let us be precisely clear about what this Tory Government will do for health care for the people of the east end of London. We will invest £230 million in building a brand new hospital to deliver 21st-century care to people in the centre of London. The founders of St. Bartholomew's hospital would be proud of us.

Mr. Brooke: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the accelerated bed closures at Bart's have exacerbated the distress of local people, who are already acknowledged to be disadvantaged by the original decision on Bart's? Does he consider that a more sensitive political decision of a two-site project at Bart's might have greatly facilitated the progress of this particular private finance initiative?

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend has always pursued the interests and views of his constituents very honourably and straightforwardly with both me and my predecessor. As I made clear when I took over these responsibilities, I do not believe that the holder of any ministerial office can revisit all the decisions made by his or her predecessor. I am quite clear that the course of action on which my predecessor embarked will deliver the improved quality of health care—both primary and hospital-based care—to my right hon. Friend's constituents which both he and I would want to see.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February. [14757]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the Scots and the Welsh were to be given their own Parliament there would be an overwhelming demand from my constituents in Essex, and elsewhere in England, for English Members of Parliament to be given exclusive control over English affairs? What consequence does he think that that would have for the integrity of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about the anomalies that would be thrown up were there to be a Scottish or Welsh Parliament. The shadow Foreign Secretary once said, when he was shadow Health Secretary, that he as a Scot could not be Health Secretary in England were health to be devolved to a Scottish Parliament. Clearly there are much wider applications than just health were such a Parliament to be established. That is just one of many anomalies thrown up by the policy of devolution which I hope that we will be able to examine this week.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister recall the promise that he made on "Panorama" a couple of years ago that the excesses that we saw in the water industry would not be repeated in the rail industry? Is he aware that, in the next few days, the second of the railway rolling stock companies, which was bought on privatisation for £580 million, is to be sold for £900 million? The first rolling stock company, having been bought for just over £500 million, was sold a few months later for more than £800 million. Does he agree that such profits are entirely unjustified?

The Prime Minister: I seem to recall the right hon. Gentleman saying that he supported the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition. That seems to apply only in generality and not in the real world when companies are efficient and sold on. The right hon. Gentleman and his party are as opposed to private ownership and privatisation today as they have ever been at any stage. They know that that is so and take every opportunity that they can to try to denigrate the success across the whole range of privatisation.

Mr. Blair: I certainly support the enterprise of the market. What I do not support is the incompetence of the

Government. I believe that most people in this country will see the difference between making an honest profit and profiteering.

Can I point out to the Prime Minister that, in the sale in the next few days, the managing director, who put in £110,000 a year ago, will make £20 million and the finance and engineering directors, who put in £80,000, will make £10 million each, and it is reported that the part-time chairman of the company privatised earlier, who worked for one day a month and put in £25,000, has walked away with £4 million? Does the Prime Minister believe that that is the enterprise of the market? Is it not simple profiteering?

The Prime Minister: It is hard not to remember that the right hon. Gentleman's private office is funded by the profits of privatisation. If such funds are so wrong, perhaps he will pay them back to those who provided them. It is not all that long ago that he was saying:

"the pragmatic approach to privatisation is . . . correct. The key is . . . sticking to it regardless of the pressures."

Of course, he said that in South Africa; what he says here is quite different.

Mr. Blair: May I suggest to the Prime Minister that, just for once at one of these Prime Minister's Question Times, he tries answering the question put to him? Is there not the sharpest contrast between the massive windfall gains—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us have a little order in this House. I can hear the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) shouting and bawling.

Mr. Blair: Is there not the sharpest contrast between the massive windfall gains made on the sale of a public asset that is effectively run through public subsidy, and the misery of thousands of commuters yesterday at Waterloo station, who saw their trains cancelled and their services destroyed because the train company laid off one tenth of its drivers? Is not that the clearest example of a Conservative Government favouring the few at the expense of the many?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman remembers the bad old days of British Rail nationalisation—services were cut with no protection for the passenger. Now, penalties can be imposed and passengers have the right to apply for compensation. Clearly, from what he is saying, he is proposing new capital controls on the market. We look forward to hearing precisely what those are. He cannot deny that privatisation has been a success. Investment is at record levels. *[Interruption.]* It is interesting to see Labour Members' opposition to private ownership. I shall let them hoot a little longer. New rolling stock is being introduced, extra services are being offered—new services, new investment and higher standards. That is through private ownership across the range of privatised industries. People recall what it was like when Governments tried to run them.

Q2. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February. [14758]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Dunn: Is my right hon. Friend aware that grammar schools and high schools exist in Dartford and in a further 60 constituencies across the country as a result of the election and re-election of Conservative Governments since 1979? The only guarantee of their continued existence is the Conservative party, and not the nightmare coalition of Opposition parties.

The Prime Minister: That must be right. The message to parents is quite clear: Labour in office would wipe out grammar schools. Labour local authority leaders have made that absolutely clear. As the shadow education spokesman said some time ago,

"Watch my lips. . . . With Labour there will be no selection."

There would be no selection, no choice, no improved standards, no opportunities and, if Labour had had its way, no tests, no information to parents and no improvement in education across the board. The worst 20 education authorities are all long-term Labour education authorities. That is not an accident; it is inevitable, given Labour's policies and instincts.

Q3. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February. [14759]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winnick: Does the Prime Minister take the same view as I do: that the *Daily Mail* was right to campaign for the murderers of Stephen Lawrence to be brought to justice, and to name names? All law-abiding citizens are pleased that the murderer of Philip Lawrence, the headmaster who was knifed to death, is in prison—for a long time to come, I hope—but it is a matter of deep and continuing concern that the murderers of the 18-year-old lad who was knifed to death almost four years ago have not been brought to justice. Should not the authorities explore every avenue to ensure that his murderers are brought before the courts?

The Prime Minister: The whole House is united in offering its sympathy to the parents of Stephen Lawrence, and in condemning this unpunished racist attack. There is total unanimity on that point. I am not a lawyer, but I understand that there is no question of statutory contempt as a result of the activities of the *Daily Mail*. As the House is aware, it is not through lack of effort that no successful prosecution has yet been brought. I hope that, even at this stage, it will be possible to mount a successful prosecution. If evidence is forthcoming, it will be examined. There is no lack of will to prosecute.

Mr. Duncan: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, unlike Labour's foreign affairs spokesman, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), he is not

"at home with the European social model"?

Will he also confirm that if we were to adopt that habit in this country, 23 million households would immediately face a £2,300 tax hike, which they would otherwise not need to pay?

The Prime Minister: Unlike the shadow Foreign Secretary, who alas is not present, I am self-evidently not at home with the European social model. It is evident why no one should be. The head of European operations at one of Britain's most successful companies was quoted in one of yesterday's newspapers. He referred to one European country, and said:

"The costs were absurd and everything we wanted to do was blocked by the unions . . . Whenever we wanted to do anything to improve the business, their first reaction was to call a meeting of the works council."

The senior executive of Grundig said:

"No employee or business is safe."

That is the reality of the way in which these well-meaning ideas work in practice. The second reality is the 4.5 million unemployed in Germany, the 3 million unemployed in France and the 2 million plus unemployed in Italy.

Q4. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February. [14760]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Prime Minister agree that we owe a debt to those people who fought in the second world war and who, in their working lives, created the wealth of this nation, and that they should be treated with the greatest respect? Is he aware that in my constituency two elderly people's homes are to be closed? The age of the people in those homes ranges from 70 plus to the 90s. Does that reflect a civilised society, and will the Prime Minister speak to the Minister responsible to ensure that some action is taken to avoid breaking up what is now a family of people in their dotage?

The Prime Minister: Of course I agree with the general proposition with which the hon. Gentleman started his question. I do not know the details of the case that he raises, but I will certainly ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to examine it. When he has done so, I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Q5. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February. [14761]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Robathan: In the course of his busy day, has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to study the form for the 5 o'clock race at Market Rasen? If so, has he noted a sporting chance at 8/1 called "Pause for Thought"? While welcoming any convert to Conservative principles, does he agree that "Pause for Thought" might be a maxim to the recent converts to privatising the Tote?

The Prime Minister: The plan to privatise the Tote, apparently floated by the shadow Chancellor, seems to have been shot down very speedily by the shadow Foreign Secretary. One might say that it fell at the first fence.

Q6. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February. [14762]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Martin: On the question of a Scottish Parliament, I notice that the Secretary of State for Scotland says one thing and the Secretary of State for Health says another, but it would be petty, mean and spiteful if any future Tory Government tried to dismantle the Parliament that the Scottish people want.

The Prime Minister: I hope that we shall have the opportunity of a detailed and sensible debate on devolution proposals—

Mr. Skinner: What? In here?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I had hoped in here on Thursday, and beyond here thereafter, because, despite the passions and convictions felt about this issue by people on both sides of the argument, we can all, I hope, agree that it is an issue of crucial importance to the future of Scotland, of Wales, of the House and of other parts of the United Kingdom. I hope therefore that we can deal with it in detail. There are many questions to be asked and answered. I hope that that is the nature of the debate that we will have in the weeks ahead.

BILL PRESENTED

Waste Prevention

Mr. Gary Waller, supported by Sir Teddy Taylor, Mrs. Diana Maddock, Mr. Cynog Dafis, Sir John Hunt, Mrs. Helen Jackson, Sir David Knox, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Matthew Taylor and Mr. Barry Sheerman, presented a Bill to enable certain local authorities to make arrangements to reduce, prevent or avoid waste in their area; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 108].

Victims of Crime

3.32 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to create a new absolute defence to the crime of common assault upon a person engaged in certain offences; to require the prosecution to obtain the leave of the court before a person is tried with an assault against a person engaged in certain offences; to prevent criminal compensation being awarded in certain circumstances; to require the plaintiff in civil proceedings to obtain the leave of the court before proceeding in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes.

The purpose—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Mr. Sweeney—just hold on a moment. Would Members leaving please do so quietly? We have business to conduct in the House. Come along. Mr. Sweeney, raise your voice.

Mr. Sweeney: The purpose of the Bill is to make it less likely that a person who purports to act in self-defence or in defence of property against a criminal will himself end up being sued or prosecuted for his actions. My Bill is not designed to give victims licence to attack criminals in any way they choose, and it is not intended to create an American-style gun culture. However, it would help to correct the impression that is sometimes given by the media, that the courts and Parliament care more about the welfare of criminals than about their unfortunate victims.

All hon. Members will be aware of the well-publicised cases in which victims have been taken to court for acts of self-defence, only to be acquitted months later by a jury which, having considered the evidence, has concluded that the behaviour complained of was reasonable in the circumstances. In the meantime, the defendant, who has already had to put up with a crime committed against his person or property, has the added worry of court proceedings against him, and the risk of imprisonment in a serious case.

My Bill would address those problems in three ways. First, a victim who committed a common assault—the most trivial type of assault known to the law—would have an absolute defence if he could show that, at the time of the assault, his victim was engaged in committing a criminal offence. For example, if a woman's handbag was being snatched and she hit her assailant across the face, she could not face charges, provided that she did not injure her assailant, even though her action would amount to a technical assault.

Secondly, in the case of more serious assaults by victims of crime, my Bill would provide that no criminal proceedings could be brought against the victim unless the approval of a judge in the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court had first been obtained. Similarly, no civil proceedings could be brought against a victim for compensation without the approval of a judge of the appropriate civil court.

Thirdly, my Bill would provide that a victim of crime, even if found guilty of assaulting his criminal attacker, could not have a criminal injuries compensation award made against him. That would not prevent the injured criminal from mounting a civil claim, subject to the success of a preliminary application to a judge for leave to bring the proceedings.

My Bill would not prevent a victim of crime from being sued or prosecuted for going too far in an act of self-defence. However, it would provide a screening device, making it less likely that victims would be prosecuted or sued. The need for a preliminary application by the prosecution, or the plaintiff in civil proceedings, to a judge would make the Crown Prosecution Service or the plaintiff think twice before proceeding. In considering the applications, judges would have to consider the public interest and take into account the desirability of ensuring that, in a finely balanced case, the law should lean in favour of victims rather than villains.

The Government have done much to help the victims of crime. For example, they have improved facilities so that, in all our modern courts, witnesses can be segregated from defendants. Furthermore, the Government have improved the efficiency of the police, increased the number of police officers, and of course, introduced tougher penalties to deal with villains. Nevertheless, the public still remain concerned, as my postbag demonstrates, that the law is biased in favour of the villain and against the victim. That grievance, which is shared throughout the country, will be redressed by my Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Walter Sweeney, Sir Rhodes Boyson, Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, Mr. David Evans, Mr. John Greenway, Sir Ivan Lawrence, Mr. Edward Leigh, Sir Peter Lloyd, Mr. James Pawsey, Mr. John Redwood, Sir Trevor Skeet and Mr. Michael Stephen.

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Walter Sweeney accordingly presented a Bill to create a new absolute defence to the crime of common assault upon a person engaged in certain offences; to require the prosecution to obtain the leave of the court before a person is tried with an assault against a person engaged in certain offences; to prevent criminal compensation being awarded in certain circumstances; to require the plaintiff in civil proceedings to obtain the leave of the court before proceeding in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 109].

Orders of the Day

Firearms (Amendment) Bill (Allocation of Time)

3.39 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I beg to move,

That the Order of the House [18th November], as varied by the Order of the House [25th November], be supplemented as follows:

Lords Amendments

1.—(1) The proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting.

(2) The Lords Amendments shall be taken in the order shown in the following Table and, subject to the provisions of the Order [18th November], each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

TABLE

Lords Amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Nos. 8 and 12	6.15 p.m.
Nos. 25, 26, 27 and 93	7.30 p.m.
No. 40	8.15 p.m.
Remaining Amendments	9.00 p.m.

2.—(1) For the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 above—

(a) the Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of the Lords Amendment, shall then put forthwith the Question on any further Amendment of the said Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in the said Lords Amendment or, as the case may be, in the said Lords Amendment as amended;

(b) the Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to her to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment and then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in their Amendment, or, as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended;

(ii) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in a Lords Amendment;

(iii) put forthwith with respect to the Amendments designated by the Speaker which have not been disposed of the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said Amendments; and

(iv) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments;

(c) as soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments, or disposed of an Amendment relevant to a Lords Amendment which has been disagreed to, the Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to that Lords Amendment.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Stages subsequent to first Consideration of Lords Amendments

3.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after the commencement of those proceedings.

(3) For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion—

(a) the Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) the Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining items in the Lords Message as appear to her to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on any item;

(ii) in the case of each remaining item designated by the Speaker, put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in their Proposal; and

(iii) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords on all the remaining Lords Proposals.

(4) Proceedings under this paragraph shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Supplemental

4.—(1) The Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its Chairman.

(2) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

5.—(1) In this paragraph "the proceedings" means proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments, on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill, on the appointment, nomination and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and the appointment of its chairman and on the Report of such Committee.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(3) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, the proceedings shall be made except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(4) If the proceedings are interrupted by a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 at any time (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) the bringing to a conclusion of any part of the proceedings which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

The first anniversary of the dreadful tragedy at Dunblane will be in three weeks. In the year that has passed, the Government have established a public inquiry under Lord Cullen, responded to each of his recommendations, and prepared a major Bill which implements the tighter controls that he recommended. Those of his recommendations that can be introduced administratively will also be brought into effect.

The Bill itself was first published on 1 November 1996. In less than four months, it has passed through both Houses, to reach its final consideration stages this week. Both Houses have given the highest priority to the serious matters in it, and that priority must continue, to ensure that it reaches the statute book without delay. The allocation of time order allows the House five hours in total to consider this order and the amendments to the Bill that were tabled in another place.

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

The main amendments, on disassembly and compensation, have already been extensively debated in the House. Five hours have already been spent, either by the House or in Committee, discussing those two subjects. I am therefore confident that this order will enable hon. Members on both sides of the House to make their points today. Within the five-hour period—depending on the length of this debate, for which one hour is allowed, if necessary—the debate on disassembly will continue until 6.15 pm; on compensation until 7.30 pm; on starter shooters until 8.15 pm; and on the other amendments until 9.00 pm.

We have made that allocation because, if the amendment on disassembly were to be allowed, it would completely change the Bill's focus and undermine the case for licensed pistol clubs, which are the subject of part II of the Bill, and it would also weaken the general prohibition on handguns in part I. It is an important issue.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will my right hon. Friend also admit that, if disassembly were accepted by the House, it would also save the Government an enormous amount of money?

Miss Widdecombe: The merits of disassembly are properly to be debated in the first consideration of their Lordships' amendments. I therefore do not think that I should be drawn down the very tempting path offered by my hon. Friend. I understand that he feels strongly on the issue, and I look forward to hearing his comments later.

As I said, much debate has taken place on compensation, but I still believe that it is right that one hour should be set aside to deal with such an important topic.

We believe that the motion will permit sufficient opportunity to re-examine the concerns raised in another place, while ensuring that there is no undue delay in the Bill's passage. I therefore commend it to the House.

3.42 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): The underlying premise of my right hon. Friend's speech was that no delay should be allowed to interfere in the Bill's passage. However, one development since the matter was first mooted is that the public have begun to consider the underlying issues much more seriously than they understandably did in the immediate aftermath of the appalling Dunblane tragedy. I am sure that I am not the only hon. Member who has met many people who are undoubtedly responsible in their use of firearms. I wonder whether it would not be a great deal better if the House were to spend rather longer before rushing the Bill on to the statute book.

3.43 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): We have been told that great urgency is required to pass this legislation. Apparently such great urgency is required that there has been more than a moderate degree of co-operation between Government and Opposition Front Benchers. Sadly, the observation that I must make on that co-operation—or should I say, collusion—is that, when the Government and the Opposition get together as of one mind, they usually make a mess of it, and they are doing so again on this occasion. We are told that we must get this Bill through in the shortest period and with the greatest haste, despite the fact that we are dealing with a complex set of circumstances.

I want to try to educate the House this afternoon—I do not use that term arrogantly—on aspects of legislation related to firearms that should have been considered, but which, frankly, have been neglected. Some hon. Members present this afternoon will recall that I was the Opposition Whip during debates on the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 following Hungerford, and they will realise that some of the remarks I make this afternoon will repeat some of the comments I made then.

I remind the House that there is not and will not be a central register of licence holders—no matter whether we pass the Bill as it stands today or not. Let me try to explain what I mean. If someone in London applies for a firearms certificate, the police do a number of checks on that individual and his background. They go to the domestic violence unit to see whether he or she has been in the habit of knocking anyone about. They go to the local intelligence officer to see whether that beat officer has any knowledge that might preclude the issue of such a licence. The police check with section SO18, the adult cautions section.

Madam Speaker: Order. May I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that we are debating an allocation of time motion? He is going into a great many details that he could possibly reserve for the debates on the amendments. We are at the moment debating only the allocation of time, and I should be glad if he will consider that and come to it when he resumes his speech.

Mr. Cook: I am deeply grateful for your guidance, Madam Speaker, but I have to point out that the case I am making is that we are talking about a limitation of time, but I am referring to aspects of the legislation which have not been covered and which cannot be covered because the following amendments are specific. These matters cannot be discussed, as anyone doing so would be ruled out of order.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): In support of the plea that the hon. Gentleman is making, can I point out that the guillotine motion allows us exactly 45 minutes to discuss the whole question of compensation? The Minister of State has just circulated a 14-page document on compensation, which I have just received. Are we seriously expected to deal with a complicated issue affecting so many people in 45 minutes flat?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman almost makes my case for me, but not in its entirety. I have received the same document, but I have not got around to reading it. Much that I want to refer to is impossible to cover in any way other than during the debate on the allocation of time. My complaint is that the length of time allocated by the Government is totally unreasonable and has nothing to do with democracy, rationality, a logical approach or even technical expertise. Frankly, I am gravely disappointed in the Government. I am even more disappointed in my own party.

My point is that the kind of cautious approach used in London is important. Adult cautions are checked—in other words, if a person has received a caution, it stays on the record. Strangely enough, we know that Mr. Hamilton had cautions aplenty, but that is another matter. The police in London check the police national computer to find out about convictions, and Infos, the intelligence pool. They check the general registry, a library of all surplus files of unfounded allegations. They do all those checks to find out whether Jack the lad is suitable for the issue of a firearms certificate. So Jack the lad simply needs to move out of London and down to Essex or up to Yorkshire—or even to Teesside. He can then start the process again, and if the local constabulary is not as diligent as the London police, the certificate can be issued. There is no central register to show up such a dangerous practice.

Section 7 permits allow a person to hold a shotgun or a firearm temporarily—usually if someone has died and the weapon is in their effects. A certain Member of this House died not a right long time ago and a huge German machine gun was found in his cellar, along with more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition. His heirs had to deal with it sensibly.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Who was it?

Mr. Cook: I am afraid that I cannot tell my hon. Friend, because he has a practice of disclosing names from the Dispatch Box. I would prefer to keep the name to myself. I shall tell my hon. Friend at a later date.

Section 7 permits give an inheritor time to get rid of the inheritance. Strangely, the police have no legal powers to make any enforcement on storage or notification of disposal. That is another area that has not been dealt with.

Different ages apply to different certificates. That is confusing, and the matter could have done with some attention. The House may be surprised to learn that a shotgun certificate can be granted at birth, whereas a firearms certificate cannot be granted before the age of 14. That is not dealt with in the Bill.

Someone with a firearms certificate can be given a firearm at the age of 14, when they get the certificate. Someone with a shotgun certificate cannot be given a shotgun until the age of 15. That is another strange anomaly that could have been dealt with if any real thought had been given to the Bill.

Someone without a firearms certificate cannot borrow a firearm, even if they are supervised by a certificate holder, until the age of 17. However, someone without a shotgun certificate can borrow a shotgun, if supervised, from birth. A two-year-old can run around legally with a borrowed shotgun. That is yet another issue that is not covered. I could go on with other examples of negligence.

There is almost no control over shotgun ammunition. Having purchased ammunition, I could give any hon. Member 1,000 rounds without breaking the law. However, I am not allowed to give anyone even one round of firearms ammunition—not even .22 ammunition. I can insist that firearms ammunition is stored securely, but no one can legally insist that shotgun ammunition is stored securely. That is yet another example of negligence by the Government and the Opposition.

The police cannot put additional conditions on shotgun certificates, so we cannot insist on where they are stored, whereas we can with firearms. We therefore do not know where shotguns will be if we have to look for them. The police cannot limit the number of shotguns on a shotgun certificate, so it is possible for one shotgun certificate holder to buy hundreds of shotguns with no check on where they go. Anyone can set up as a supplier to Jack the lad in the underworld.

The police have no statutory right to enter and inspect the secure storage facilities of firearms or shotguns. A licence holder can legally refuse to let the police check whether he has a gun safe in which to store his weapons.

There are further examples of negligence. I am sorry if I am boring the House, but it is important that the catalogue of negligence should be known to the public. People think that we are going to protect them. I am trying to highlight the fact that we are doing anything but that.

Most of our European neighbours, who suffer much criticism here from time to time for all sorts of reasons, insist on the granting of a hunting licence before setting someone loose with a hunting weapon. To get a licence, people have to undergo a period of training and monitoring. A pistol licence holder must pass a similar six-month probation period at a pistol club here before the police will issue a licence, so we know that an applicant can handle firearms properly.

If someone applies for a shotgun or rifle licence, the police have no way of checking that the applicant knows which end of the gun is dangerous or even one end from the other, or whether he or she knows which species are protected and which can be exterminated.

I have mentioned a number of matters, and I could go on, but I know that other hon. Members want to speak on the limitation of time motion. Perhaps most important—I seem to have lost the papers, so I will have to speak from memory—is the fact that—

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Disassembly.

Mr. Cook: It is not dissembling, and that is a fact—it could be disassembly.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): I am finding my hon. Friend's contribution fascinating, as I am ignorant on these matters—*[Interruption.]* I know a great deal about more things than most of those sluggish lads on the Conservative Benches. I am finding my hon. Friend's speech fascinating, and I am prepared to wait until he finds the lost papers.

Madam Speaker: I am not.

Mr. Cook: There is no need, Madam Speaker. I said that I would speak from memory, and I will do just that. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) for his intervention, in so far as it shows his experience and knowledge of the theatrical and the voice from the wings.

Mr. Faulds: Never from the wings—centre stage.

Mr. Cook: I am sure that, in another incarnation, my hon. Friend will acquire safe employment as the prompter.

I started my observations on negligence by commenting that there was no central register of licence holders—a grave weakness, as I pointed out, because Jack the lad can

[Mr. Cook]

ran about. What is probably even worse is the fact that there is no central register of the weapons. We have never had one, and it is not proposed that there should be one. Perhaps the Government's reluctance to accept that principle is born of their doctrinaire attitude towards deregulation.

We are told that there could be 4 million illegal weapons out there, and that there are perhaps 120,000 certificated weapons. Without a central register, we are making those 120,000 weapons illegal—adding them to the 4 million which are already illegal. We do not have an account of any of them, and we do not propose to have one. We are making a bad situation worse, and we are making it worse in a hurry. We are not allowing anyone to talk about it sensibly. When people try to put a sensible point, they get shakes of the head, as I am getting from my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench.

I appeal for common sense. For God's sake, people out there need protection, and it is our duty to give it. We are not doing so at the moment.

3.58 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South–West): I agree with every word that passed the lips of the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). This is a bad Bill, which has been badly considered.

At least some of my hon. Friends will be concerned about the wider problem of creating an unnecessary confrontation between this House and the House of Lords. We who are anxious to preserve our constitution and its checks and balances should realise what a grave disservice we are doing with this guillotine motion.

When the House of Lords says that it is not sure that we have got something right, amends our legislation and sends it back to us, it is saying in the politest possible way, "Please think again; we think you might have got this wrong." Sometimes that is said especially insistently, as when the Bill or the amendments we have passed obviously do not have the support of a decision at a general election or of the people.

When we are in our most populist—and especially our agreed populist—mood, when we are at our worst and most tyrannical, the House of Lords says, "Hang on a moment. Think again, and please discuss the matter more carefully." Surely we as Tories should understand the importance of that request, yet we are giving the matter a cursory debate on a guillotine, after which we plan to have a short, truncated discussion on a few selected items, which, as the hon. Member for Stockton, North said, will be kept even shorter by the agreed discouragement that will be evinced from the Front Benches against every dissident voice; so 50,000 people will go unrepresented because of the gross tyranny of the House.

We who most of all represent the checks and balances of the constitution should draw back from an unnecessary confrontation.

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman spoke about the 50,000 people. I wonder what he would say to a couple I met in my constituency, near the hon. Gentleman's: Martyn and Barbara Dunn, who came to a ceremony to commemorate the massacre at Dunblane, in which they lost their five-year-old daughter Charlotte. They are very keen on what we intend to do, as are all the other parents who lost children. What would the hon. Gentleman say to those parents, who believe that what the House intends to do is right, and that, although there is no guarantee that such a massacre will never occur again, it is one way of trying to prevent events such as happened at Hungerford and at Dunblane?

Mr. Budgen: I would try to be as sympathetic as I possibly could, and I would explain to them that I understood entirely their wish to have the use of all guns banned; but I would say that people who engaged in the lawful and honourable activity of target shooting were entitled to continue to do that. I would say at the end of the conversation, as quietly and as carefully as I could, that as a matter of fact I thought that their appalling tragedy probably did not make them better judges of legislation, and that it might indeed make them worse judges. I would say that, fortunately, we have in general a rather good system of considering legislation in a way that is somewhat detached from their raw emotions, and that the most important thing was to consider legislation carefully and not in a mood of deep emotion. I think that, on reflection, they would understand that.

If the hon. Gentleman says that that is not so, it might be of some interest to him to note that, after the Duke of Edinburgh had made some remarks about the legislation some time just before Christmas, it was obvious that the public as a whole took a more reflective attitude.

In our constitution, it is not only the newspapers, the royal family and others who have a right to comment; it is the legitimate interest of the other place to ask us to think again. If we pass this guillotine motion, we are palpably not thinking again.

The other place faces a difficult tactical question about which issues to disagree with us on, but I hope that it will not disagree with us about the Crime (Sentences) Bill, because the proviso in that case—the argument as between exceptional circumstances and circumstances that are unjust—is not a big issue. While great lawyers make great fortunes arguing the difference between such words, it perhaps does not affect many people.

Perhaps we could say respectfully to the other place that there is some presumption in its proposals for extra compensation. If £500 million of public expenditure is to be made, it should be authorised by this place, not the House of Lords. However, if we reject the Lords amendment on disassembly, I hope that their Lordships will persist with it.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): My hon. Friend suggested that 50,000 people were affected, a point that was picked up by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). The figure of 50,000 firearms certificate holders is merely the Home Office figure, not the real number of firearms certificate holders affected, which is more like 100,000. To those one must add the number of people who legitimately shoot with pistols in recognised and registered clubs, who do not need firearms certificates. The matter goes far wider than the 50,000 people my hon. Friend mentioned.

Mr. Budgen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I was trying to put my point as moderately as possible. When I mentioned figures, I wanted to quote the lower end of the scale.

I hope that their Lordships will recognise that, whether it is 50,000 or 100,000, it is not a fashionable section of the community. I hope that they will consider how they would feel if that many game shooters were being prevented from carrying on their lawful activity.

I do not want to put this offensively to their Lordships, but it would be sad if the suspicion arose that because, by and large, these are unfashionable people, their Lordships were not prepared to exercise their proper duty to prevent populist legislation, but that, in a future Parliament where hunting or game shooting was threatened, they would come bustling along to exercise their constitutional rights. The 50,000 involved are honourable people, who have been treated in a disgraceful, hurried and populist way. I hope that their Lordships will go very slowly in considering the measure.

On this point, I am able to join the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), who, last Wednesday, in discussing the Police Bill—which had come from the Lords—sensibly asked why a Firearms (Amendment) Bill could not be introduced at the beginning of the next Parliament. I agree entirely. One could be introduced slowly and carefully. If their Lordships suggested that other measures could be brought forward in the interim, I would agree.

The House knows that the Home Office firearms consultative committee was not invited to give its opinion on the Cullen report. The proposals were rushed out. We could in the interim tighten the rules on the qualities and characters of people who own firearms certificates. There could be some extra surveillance of the membership of gun clubs. All those things have been suggested as sensible administrative measures by the committee.

I do not want it to be suggested for a moment that I am indifferent to the arguments of those who fear the repetition of a crime by one of the relatively small number of people who hold guns legally. We all know that the generality—96 per cent.—of crimes are committed by people who hold guns illegally.

There are small measures that could be taken between now and Christmas to introduce some discipline to those who hold guns lawfully. Most importantly, I suggest that Conservative Members should avoid an unnecessary confrontation with their Lordships. If their Lordships are exercising their proper constitutional duty, they will come to the aid of 50,000 people who have been treated very shabbily.

4.9 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): As my right hon. Friend the Minister—it is a great pleasure to address her in that way—will recall, I was not called to speak on the original guillotine motion. I do not complain about that; I was sitting where the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), usually sits, and I understand completely why I was overlooked.

On that occasion, I would have followed my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) in the debate, and I would have spoken about the effect on people who are following the proceedings on the Bill of the speed with which a series of guillotine motions have obliged us to consider it.

I remonstrated thereafter with an hon. Friend—whom I shall anonymously call a representative of the business managers—that we had insufficient time in which to debate the matters properly. He said that no one else had made that complaint. Our conversation occurred before Third Reading, when I know for certain that several hon. Members—including me, incidentally—were kept out of the debate.

More seriously, I recall the debate on compensation. I mentioned the matter on Report, and I do so again now because of the debate that we shall have this evening. About 10 minutes before the end of the debate on Report, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary—I do not accuse him of having orchestrated the scenario deliberately—declined to give way to an hon. Friend who sought to intervene, on the ground that he did not have sufficient time. It is ironic that the guillotine motion should have the effect of saving my right hon. and learned Friend from the obligation of replying properly to the debate.

We shall have the compensation debate this evening. I do not share the advantage of the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) or of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) in having seen the 14-page document. The good news is that I calculate that we will have an hour and a quarter for the compensation debate rather than 45 minutes, so we shall have slightly more time in which to absorb the details.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the document, which was courteously sent to some hon. Members who participated in the debate, opens Pandora's box.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that comment, and I anticipate reading the document all the more. I simply repeat that, given the interest that the public have expressed in these matters, it is unfortunate that we should give the impression that we are rushing them through without proper consideration.

4.12 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Minister very courteously sent this letter to me today. It states:

"I am enclosing for your information a copy of a consultation document which sets out our proposals for the detailed arrangements for the firearms compensation scheme to be introduced under the Firearms (Amendment) Bill. The document will be used as a basis for consultation by the Home Office with the police and shooting organisations. I am sending copies to all those who participated when the issue of compensation was debated on the Floor of the House. A copy is also being placed in the Library".

Why did that letter arrive after lunch on 18 February—the day that we are debating the matter? Even at first glance, there are all sorts of questions to be asked. It would be improper to abuse a debate on the timetable by asking too many detailed questions. However, before we limit ourselves to three quarters of an hour of debating time, I refer to options B and C. Option B is payment based on a price contained in a published list of values and option C is payment based on individual valuation.

We have received no clear answer—at least I have not heard it—to a question posed by the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and many others as to who

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

would do that evaluation. There is cheerful talk about evaluation, but precisely who will do it? The idea that it will be agreed easily and automatically is fairyland.

What about paragraph 14, on ex gratia payments? The letter states:

"He could either choose to lodge his pistol with the police pending its retrieval for use in an approved club, or he could choose to surrender ownership straight away and seek an ex gratia payment for it at the same time as any claim for compensation in respect of higher calibre guns is made."

Who will decide that ex gratia payment? We are talking about a great deal of money.

The list that accompanies the letter purports to give valuations on a range of guns—for example, the Astra 3 in barrel, the Colt new service and the Colt diamond back 6 in. I was told off the cuff today, just after receiving the document, that the figures given for valuation are totally unrealistic. For example, the Cold diamond back 6 in is valued at £235, but I have been told that we are talking about thousands if the owner's perceived valuation is to be gone along with. Owners will challenge the valuations.

I do not know whether all those matters should be confined to three quarters of an hour. As I make these points, I have a suspicion that someone else might properly be called during that period and most of us will not have time to make such points. Given that she has written to us in that way, I ask the Minister whether it is sensible to limit the highly controversial issue of compensation to three quarters of an hour.

4.15 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I have not spoken in these debates before, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I hope that you will allow me a few minutes in which to explain why I am so deeply concerned about the manner in which the debate on an extremely important piece of legislation is about to be truncated, if the House wills it so. Clearly, there will not be time for the consideration of amendments that might mitigate what will become an appalling piece of legislation if it goes through unamended.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) sought an answer to the question, "How would we feel if . . . ?" and then related the experience of two of his constituents and their appalling loss. I am the parent of three children; I have had the pleasure of watching them grow to maturity and I freely concede that I cannot begin to comprehend the anguish of the parents of Dunblane. Most of those who say, "I know how you feel," are, in my view, guilty of uttering an obscene platitude. Thank God, there are few hon. Members who have suffered anything like that sort of experience and can therefore begin to understand how others feel.

The House must do all it can to pass legislation that seeks to mitigate the possibility of a tragedy like Dunblane happening again, but we all know that in a world of madmen, whatever we do in this House cannot prevent that. Like many other hon. Members, I started out with high hopes that we would achieve something positive with the Bill, but I am concerned that the Bill will do nothing to prevent a similar recurrence and that it will do that nothing at vast expense and at great cost to an enormous number of respectable and responsible people.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), during the months that the Bill has been passing through Parliament, I have had time to realise that it is knee-jerk legislation that will go down in the annals of the House of Commons as second only to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in its appalling misconception and haste. As before, we have seen the House at its worst—when it combines to take a cross-party "I care more than you do" approach and rushes a measure through as a sop to an appalling event.

I am not a shooter—I have only ever handled a gun on military service and on the rare occasions when I have missed clay pigeons for the benefit of charity—so I have no personal vested interest in the subject. However, I have spoken to some of my constituents who are members of Swalecliffe gun club, which is located in Herne Bay in my constituency. Following a meeting with them at the end of October 1996, I wrote to the Home Secretary on 2 November 1996, asking a series of questions related directly to the compensation issues that we are about to timetable.

The Minister of State replied to me yesterday. Let me make it plain that I am grateful to her, first for the courteous nature of her reply and, secondly, for turning that reply round within about 12 hours of the letter landing on her desk. However, it has taken some months for me to receive these replies.

I raised the specific issue of what would happen to .22 pistols belonging to members of gun clubs that would go out of existence, and who would therefore have nowhere to go with them, and I asked what compensation those people would receive. I was told—hon. Members who know more about the subject than I do may be aware of this already:

"As most clubs will be unable to comply with the security requirements, initially, it is intended that the police will retain the .22 pistols in safe storage for those who are seeking a club. The time these will be retained has yet to be set, but we expect it to be a matter of years rather than months in order to give clubs time to adapt to the new requirements."

However, my right hon. Friend continues:

"In most cases, this will require the construction of a purpose-built secure range rather than the adaptation of existing ranges. Rather than a number of local ranges and small clubs, it is expected that ranges, and probably clubs, will be organised at a county or regional level. The cost of security arrangements for each club would thus be shared among a more substantial number of shooters. Members of such clubs may have to travel considerable distances to shoot, but in this respect .22 shooting will be similar to ice-skating and other sports where appropriate facilities are rare and concentrated in large towns."

If amendment No. 27 is passed tonight, the members of Swalecliffe gun club, and no doubt others represented by hon. Members on both sides of the House, will lose their facilities, and the fruits of the hard work that they have put in, without compensation—and because that amendment is one of a group of four, we shall not have more than about 45 minutes in which to raise those issues.

I was under the impression that acquisition without compensation was something that even the Opposition had eschewed as a form of political combat. Acquisition without compensation is being done in the name of a piece of legislation that will not have the effect that we intended. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) rightly said that this piece of legislation will not establish registers. It will not do what the

Metropolitan police would like. It will not prevent the circulation of illegal firearms. It will not prevent lunatics from going across the channel, for heaven's sake, buying a gun and bringing it back through the ports in my constituency, or the port in the Home Secretary's constituency, with the greatest possible ease, and making mayhem with it.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I agree with many of the points that my hon. Friend has raised. He may have received correspondence from constituents—as I have from many of mine, especially sporting shooters who compete for the United Kingdom, who shoot not only at Bisley, but elsewhere—who are especially anxious about difficulties that would be caused to them by rejection of the disassembly option. Does my hon. Friend agree that we shall not have time to discuss that issue properly if the motion is passed?

Mr. Gale: I do; and if the motion is passed, we shall not have the opportunity to discuss further the matter of single-shot guns.

I shall not detain the House, but I am very worried that, if we choose to truncate our discussion, we shall end up with another Dangerous Dogs Act piece of legislation—an appalling mess, which will achieve absolutely nothing.

4.23 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Since the Conservatives entered government in 1979, 60 Bills have been guillotined. On 59 of them, Conservative Members have remained silent during the debate except in support of the guillotine, and have trooped through the Government Lobby in support of those measures. It speaks volumes for the sense of value of the Conservative party that they remained silent on one measure after another to cut benefits for 16 to 18-year-olds; silent on one measure after another to restrict the rights of innocent seekers of immigration into this country; wholly silent on the Scottish poll tax measure in 1986; and completely silent on the English and Welsh poll tax measure in 1987.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): And the Single European Act.

Mr. Straw: Indeed, Conservative Members were almost silent—there were one or two honourable exceptions—on the Single European Act. In 1986, the Home Secretary, among others, forced the Act through the House, notwithstanding predictions from Opposition Members—including, in an eloquent winding-up speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). Then there was the Maastricht Bill, the Bill that became the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993. All Conservative Members voted for the guillotine motion, thus truncating debate on a critical constitutional measure. *[Interruption.]* Nearly all of them voted for it.

The issues in the Bill that we are debating today have, on any relative basis, been subjected to far more discussion than the issues in the Bills that I have just listed. It raises the crucial question of the control of handguns and the safety of the public. And what do we find? We find that suddenly, out of the Lobbies and the Smoking Room creep Conservative Members who want to stand up for what they see as a fundamental liberty: the right of Englishmen, and indeed Scotsmen and Welshmen, to hold guns. They did not believe that any fundamental rights were affected by the Maastricht Bill, the Single European Act, the Bills introducing the poll tax in England and Scotland or any of the immigration Bills.

Mr. John Carlisle: The hon. Gentleman was pointing at me; he obviously wished to give way to me, and I am grateful to him for doing so.

Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the fact that we are debating the Bill unusually soon after a report? As I said earlier, the Cullen report came out at 3.30 pm, and the legislation was presented to the House at 3.31 on the same afternoon. Might it not have been better if we had had a period in which to consider the report before the legislation was framed? That, of course, is why we are rushing it through now.

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman has a quarrel, it is with his own party, but if he thinks about the time scale that is involved, he will see that the argument that the House is rushing the legislation through is nonsense. That appalling tragedy happened on 13 March last year; the Cullen inquiry was then rightly established very quickly, but did not take evidence until the end of May. I understand that it then took evidence until the end of July. Lord Cullen finalised his report in September and delivered it in October, and on 16 October both the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland made statements in the House. I think that the Government were quite right to give their response to the report on that occasion: the same would be expected of any Government.

The legislation was presaged in the Queen's Speech two weeks later, and was introduced two weeks after that. It was debated in Committee on the Floor of the House for a day and a half, and then went into Standing Committee. It was further considered on the Floor of the House, and was then discussed in the other place for four days: that debate fills four full parts of *Hansard*. Now the Bill has come back to the Floor of the House of Commons. Given its importance, I feel that our proceedings should be concluded in the next week or so, but plenty of other measures of even more breadth and significance have not been given the same consideration during a guillotined set of debates.

Mr. Frank Cook: If that is true, may I ask my hon. Friend for his reaction to the nine areas of negligence that I identified earlier? Those matters could have been considered properly, and could have formed legislation much more sensible than the Bill that we are considering. Those weaknesses are apparent, although I could dig others out of the legislation if my hon. Friend wished me to. The nine areas have not been covered, and will not be covered. If the coverage of the legislation was as comprehensive as my hon. Friend makes out, why were they not attended to?

Mr. Straw: I listened to my hon. Friend's speech very carefully, but I did not follow his argument. No legislation with which I have ever been familiar has been perfect, and I am sure that this Bill could be improved. It may well be that my hon. Friend could have tabled amendments to extend control in some areas, but I do not think that that

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is an argument for the extra control that is at the heart of the Bill. If my hon. Friend believes that there ought to be improvements in certification, that is a matter for him, and one that could have been dealt with much earlier.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen) said, correctly, that we must make a judgment about the views of the other place in coming to decisions on the Commons' consideration of Lords amendments. That is entirely right, but let me reassure him about one matter. His point—I paraphrase, but only slightly—was that the toffs in the other place had not properly represented the common people: they had approved of control of handguns, which are used in general by common people, but they had protected the owners of shotguns, which are used by the more elevated classes in our society.

The only reason for the amendments coming before the House today is the action of the hereditary peers in pushing the amendments through. Often, amendments passed in the other place against the Government are passed by a majority of life peers and, as happened in the case of the poll tax, it is usually the hereditary peers who are dragooned into the Not Content Lobby in support of the Government. On this Bill, the reverse is the case.

On the first Division, that to allow the disassembly of .22-calibre firearms, 153 peers voted Content, and 139 voted Not Content, but of those 153, 105 were hereditary peers. If the hereditary peers are stripped out, it is clear that the first amendment on disassembly—to diminish the control in the Bill—was actually defeated by some 90 votes, a reversal of the position if the hereditary peers are included.

The same applies to the other key amendment that was passed in the other place, on extending compensation for loss of profit and loss of business. It was passed by 121 votes to 110, but 90 of those 121 were hereditary peers; only 31 were life peers. On the life peer measure alone, the vote was 31 to 77.

Mr. Budgen: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the advantages of the hereditary peerage is that hereditary peers are not full-time professional politicians, as are, unfortunately, the bulk of the present Members of this House? Hereditary peers probably know a great deal more about the practicalities of using weapons than do any of us, and their view is likely to be helpful to the protection of what the hon. Gentleman calls the common man.

The important point is that, as these are the last weeks of this Parliament, we cannot exercise our powers under the Parliament Act 1911. If the peers decide to go slow and not to accept our attitude towards their amendments, the legislation will fall.

Mr. Straw: I do not believe that that will happen.

The debate has revealed a high degree of anxiety on the part of Conservative Members about what they believe to be the extent of public opinion. I do not share the view of the hon. Member for Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe) that public opinion has shifted. I do believe, however, that the shooting lobby has become more organised and more frenetic in its letter writing.

I have a letter which, I gather, is to be found on the Internet site of the Sportsmans Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The letter goes into detail about the way in which those reading it should lobby Conservative Members of Parliament. It states that it is important for its members to write to Conservative Members of Parliament, and continues:

"We can only do that through a massive effort over the next five days. The Conservative Central Office do not believe that we have the numbers or the commitment to vote them out."

Further on in the letter, these chilling words appear:

"Be polite but do not leave them"—

that is, Conservative Members of Parliament—

"in doubt. Spell out exactly how you will be taking revenge if they"—

Conservative Members of Parliament—

"put this Bill on the books."

Mr. John Carlisle *rose—*

Mr. Rowe *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I am sorry; I do not have time to give way.

I do not believe that the use of the word "revenge" against Conservative Members of Parliament is an acceptable tactic. It exposes some of the motives and the hysteria of the shooting lobby.

Mr. Carlisle: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps it would help the hon. Gentleman if I informed him that the words "revenge at the polls" were—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That was an attempt to intervene after the hon. Gentleman had refused to give way.

Mr. Straw: It is good to know that the hon. Gentleman claims part authorship or knowledge of the letter, but what is on the record at the Internet site is not "revenge at the polls", just "revenge". *[Interruption.]* I gather that it has changed, no doubt because the association realised the error in its drafting.

In the hysterical reaction from some—not all—members of the shooting lobby, there has been a huge amount of disinformation about the likely position of the Government and the Labour party on the wider issue of the control of guns in our society. The Government must speak for themselves, but I believe that what is in the Bill, with the exception of the control of .22 calibre handguns, is proportionate to the problem.

The Labour party has never believed that such bans on the use of guns should be extended to shotguns. I make that absolutely clear. We respect the right of those who own shotguns for the control of vermin and for the enjoyment of country sports. We have no proposals to change that regime.

In three weeks' time, we shall see the first anniversary of the terrible shooting at Dunblane. We owe it to the memory of those who were gunned down there, and to their relatives and the community of Dunblane, to have this measure on the statute book before then. We support the guillotine motion.

4.36 pm

Miss Widdecombe: As I have only four minutes left to reply, I regret that it will not be possible for me to address every single point that was raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) suggested that there should be further delay because of growing public interest since the Bill was introduced. It has been a year since the tragedy at Dunblane, and it is quite right that the public should expect us to come forward with proposals to try, as far as possible, to avert any similar tragedy in the future, although it must be clear that that could never be absolutely guaranteed.

I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend said about the responsible nature of those who have interests in shooting. I have no doubt at all—nor have the Government—that the vast majority of people who shoot are law-abiding, decent citizens who can be utterly trusted and are utterly responsible. The fact remains that the problems at Dunblane arose through somebody misusing a gun that was lawfully owned and possessed outside a secure club.

Mr. Frank Cook: That is not so.

Miss Widdecombe: As the hon. Gentleman interrupts from a sedentary position, perhaps I can now come to his speech.

The hon. Gentleman recited a long list of matters that he said that we had neglected, but in today's debate, in Lords amendment No. 71, we shall address the issue of a central register. If he reads the *Official Report* of the Committee proceedings, he will see that we covered the issue of age limits. It is not true that a long list of matters have been ignored in the debate. Therefore, I reject his proposition that we need more time to discuss them, as many of them have already been discussed in some detail in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) raised a point about the transitional period for the holding of .22s by the police. The current schedule 1 to the Bill sets out a transitional period of a year for the holding of .22s, although that could be varied by order of the Secretary of State if necessary. I hope that that clarifies the matter.

Several hon. Members said that they wished to have longer to discuss compensation. That issue has been thoroughly rehearsed.

Two hon. Members mentioned the consultation document that we issued today. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) lamented the fact that there was not time to debate the document or to absorb it in any detail in time for today's debate. The document is, of course, intended for a much wider audience. It is not about what we are to implement or what the law should say, but is about how the implementation is to take place—

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [18 November].*

Question agreed to.

Firearms (Amendment) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 6

HAVING SMALL-CALIBRE PISTOL OUTSIDE PREMISES OF LICENSED PISTOL CLUB

Lords amendment: No. 8, in page 3, line 6, at end insert ("unless the pistol complies with subsection (2A) below.")

4.39 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): In accordance with the allocation of time order just agreed by the House, Lords amendment No. 8 will be grouped with Lords amendment No. 12. We shall also discuss the Government motions to disagree with those amendments.

Mr. Howard: The question of disassembly of handguns has been thoroughly discussed during the passage of the Bill both in this House and in another place. The Government's position has been and remains that small-calibre pistols in their complete form should be stored in secure licensed clubs. Allowing members of licensed small-calibre pistol clubs to keep the main body of the pistol at home and remove only a small part for retention at their club cannot in our view provide sufficient safeguards for the protection of the public.

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): Has my right hon. and learned Friend addressed the opposite proposition that the body of the pistol should be kept at the club and a small part only retained at home?

Mr. Howard: Yes. Indeed, it was canvassed as early as on Second Reading, when the point was put to me by—I think—the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). It is not the specific proposal contained in the amendment and I am rather doubtful about what purpose it would achieve. It would attract many of the disadvantages that the proposal specifically identified in the amendment would attract.

The Government entirely accept that members of pistol clubs licensed under the Bill would be overwhelmingly decent, law-abiding people, just as the members of pistol clubs that are allowed under the current law are overwhelmingly decent, law-abiding people. We have all, however, seen the appalling consequences that can ensue when a pistol owner is determined to perpetrate serious crime with his lawfully held gun.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The gun was certainly lawfully held, but the process by which Hamilton obtained the certificate was ludicrously slack. Had that man's record been considered by the police in granting the certificate, he would never have had the licence.

Mr. Howard: I understand my hon. Friend's feelings. That was of course considered by the police, and Lord Cullen went into that aspect of the matter very carefully

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in his report. It is of course right that those matters should be addressed as well, but I do not believe that they would provide a complete answer to the problems with which we have to deal.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Is not anybody who lies on an application form for a firearms certificate committing an offence? If a certificate is granted thereafter, is not that certificate, by definition, invalid? Was that not so with Hamilton? Is that not what Lord Cullen found? What did Lord Cullen recommend with regard to disassembly?

Mr. Howard: I do not know quite what conclusion my hon. Friend sought to reach on the basis of the first part of his question. The certificate held by Thomas Hamilton was not declared invalid and was therefore quite valid until it had been revoked. I shall come to Lord Cullen's recommendations on the question of disassembly.

In considering their response to Lord Cullen's very thorough inquiry into what happened in Dunblane, the Government took the view that it was right if at all possible to allow the sport of pistol shooting to continue in some form, and the Bill allows for small-calibre pistol clubs, operating under a very high degree of security, to be licensed by the Secretary of State. The question is what should be done with the small calibre .22 handguns that are used at such clubs.

The Government propose that such guns should be kept at secure club premises. Amendments to the Bill in another place would allow club members to keep their handgun at home as long as some part of it was always removed and kept at the club. Under the amendments, that part would be the slide of pistols, the cylinders of revolvers or some other part to be specified by the Secretary of State.

As has been said so many times in discussion of this issue, it would be possible for handguns to be kept in a disassembled form. It is said that most owners of most handguns would be capable in practice of removing the vital part to leave at the club and fitting it again when they returned. The Government do not dispute that, but that is not the real question. The question is whether such a procedure would give the public a sufficient assurance against misuse of a handgun by a club member. The Government's view is that it would not.

For example, some people will possess more than one set of barrel and slide components for their pistol or possess components that will allow the calibre of the weapon to be converted by the simple substitution of components. It would be impossible to be certain that a person could not still possess a complete weapon at home by keeping such an illicit spare. Indeed, the frames of some pistols are specially made so that the owner can purchase a comprehensive range of barrels of different lengths and cartridge chamberings, which can be simply substituted and fitted at the will of the user. That could again lead to a person being in possession of a complete firearm, although appearing to comply with club regulations.

4.45 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells) *rose—*

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I will give way first to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory).

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that a shooter keeping illicit spares would be breaching the conditions of the firearms certificate? If someone is prepared to do that, they may easily do the same for an entire pistol. I am not entirely clear that my right hon. and learned Friend's objection to the disassembly option on those grounds is in fact valid.

Mr. Howard: I understand my right hon. Friend's point, which is serious and substantial. He is right that those who would be engaging in the kind of conduct that I am describing would be in breach of the law. I see the force of the argument that those who are prepared to break the law can obtain access to illegal guns. At the end of the day, my right hon. Friend—and no doubt some other of my hon. Friends—and I may simply have to disagree on the matter. The proposal would place a temptation before those who would be tempted to take advantage of what would rapidly become a loophole in the law. As I shall go on to explain, the difficulties of policing the proposed arrangement would be extreme. I believe that on those grounds we must reject my right hon. Friend's argument, although I see its force, and adhere to the proposals that the Government originally made.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman allowed me to make some more progress and finish the point.

Furthermore, under a scheme of the kind contemplated under the amendments, it would be the responsibility of the club to ensure that the detached component parts were lodged safely and securely and that they were always handed in when the member left the club after shooting. The club would also have to check each time that what was handed in was the component part that was supposed to be handed in and not a duplicate of some kind.

Right hon. and hon. Members will recognise that the items that we are talking about are relatively small and easily concealable pieces of metal. Clubs would of course be under a legal responsibility, set out in the terms of their licences, to ensure that booking in and out was done properly. A club that did not meet that very important responsibility would be at risk of losing its licence. If a club were not meeting the necessary standards in that respect, it would however be difficult in practice for the police to detect it. In practice, it would be a matter of what happened at the club day after day and not just on the days when a police officer was there and able to see what was going on.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I am seriously trying very hard to follow the logic and make it stand up to scrutiny. The Home Secretary objects to keeping a component at home and the barrel or the chassis of the

gun in a club. What is to stop a person who really wants to break the law having a legal gun at the club and an illegal one at home? The whole proposition is totally nonsensical.

Mr. Howard: I have to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, as I did with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells, who put the same point. Some people may not want to procure an illegal gun, but may be tempted by the possibility of having an illegally held part.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): How many?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend asks how many. The difficulty with that argument is that takes only one to engage in such activity, to procure a gun and to use it in the way in which it was used at Dunblane.

Mr. Carlisle: I confess that I can hardly believe what I am hearing from my right hon. and learned Friend. We have surely gone past the argument about legislating on the basis of whether people may be tempted to take a gun in one form or another. Either my right hon. and learned Friend believes in this legislation or he does not. I suspect that the force of argument from the Conservative Benches is beginning to get to him. Will he be tempted to think again about disassembly, and possibly to accept the Lords amendment?

Mr. Howard: I am sorry to have to disabuse my hon. Friend. I do not follow his argument that we should not legislate on the basis of temptations that may be put in people's way. We legislate on the basis of the view that we take of human behaviour: that is what all legislation is about. My hon. Friend and I may disagree about the precise aspect of human behaviour with which we are dealing, but such a judgment is the basis on which all legislation is passed in the House.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Home Secretary is right to detect an attempt to weaken his legislation. I am bound to say that, if he had decided to ban all handguns, he would not be in this difficulty. If it was the other way round, and disassembly involved the bulk of the gun being in the club and the component being outside the club, would that strengthen instead of weaken the legislation? I realise that that is not in the amendment, but has he considered that point?

Mr. Howard: I have considered that point, and I dealt with it a few moments ago when it was put to me by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells. When the hon. Gentleman got to his feet, I expected him to say that the legislation did not go far enough, and that we should have a total ban, and he duly fulfilled my expectation.

The difficulty is that however well the club carries out its responsibilities, there will be scope for an owner who has a mind to do so illicitly to take out the pistol slide, a revolver cylinder or some other small component. He may attempt to substitute it with something else, and he could do that in a variety of ways. There is no point endlessly speculating about how that could be done, but one possibility—it is only one possibility—has already been mentioned in a discussion of this issue. It could be substituted with the same component taken from a deactivated version of the same gun. The differences in appearance between a working and a deactivated component part are not necessarily large. Indeed, it is said to be one of the advantages of a deactivated gun, to those who like to possess them, that they look as much as possible like the real thing.

An owner determined upon mischief could disguise the deactivated component so that it looked on superficial inspection like the real one. It would not have to work like the real component, just look like it.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I must place on record the fact that I hardly ever disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend, but I simply cannot follow the force of his argument that we cannot proceed with legislation if some people may contravene it. That is what he is saying. We all know that it is possible for people to get hold of guns even if they have no right to have them. That will happen whatever my right hon. and learned Friend does in the Bill. I cannot follow the argument that, because some people may break the law, what my right hon. and hon. Friends have said is not reasonable. Whatever happens, some people will break the law.

Mr. Howard: I suspect that it pains me to disagree with my hon. Friend even more than it may pain her. Her point is not valid, because we have to make judgments about the effect of the laws that we pass on the behaviour of those with whom we are attempting to deal. If it is a consequence of one law rather than another that temptation is likely to be increased, and therefore likely to be succumbed to, and that that is likely to lead to more guns coming into the hands of people who might abuse them, we must take that into account. It is a matter of judgment, and my hon. Friend may legitimately arrive at a different judgment and disagree with me. It is a valid consideration, and it should be taken into account in framing the precise terms of the legislation.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North–West): The force of my right hon. and learned Friend's argument is that it is more important to remove temptation from people who he and the Minister of State have said on many occasions are the least likely people to succumb to that temptation. A large group of people will be tempted: my right hon. and learned Friend has already admitted that such people regard the legislation as totally irrelevant. They will use illegal guns. Why is he aiming at the small group of people who are the least likely to succumb to temptation?

Mr. Howard: I hope that my hon. Friend is not suggesting that we are ignoring the enormous problems that undoubtedly exist as a consequence of the use of illegal guns. We recognise the dimension of that serious problem, and the police do their utmost to deal with it every working day of the year. The fact that they are not totally successful, for reasons which we all understand, does not relieve the House of the responsibility of dealing with another aspect of the problem, which is the

[Mr. Howard]

circumstances under which firearms should be made lawfully available. It is not either/or: we have to deal with both problems as effectively as we can.

Mr. Barnes: What about the temptation of raiding a gun club? If a gun club that holds complete guns is raided, that is far more dangerous than taking away bits and pieces.

Mr. Howard: As the hon. Gentleman knows, stringent security will be put in place to deal with that problem. I am not sure that the temptation to raid a gun club for whole guns would be that much greater than the temptation to raid a gun club for the main body of the gun, which is what my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells suggested. But the hon. Gentleman is entitled to his opinion.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Howard: I shall give way, but we are on a timetable motion. Many hon. Members want to speak, and I do not want to take up their time.

Sir Terence Higgins: It is not our fault that there is a timetable motion: it is my right hon. and learned Friend's fault. We had the ludicrous position just now of the Minister of State saying that she could not give an answer because she was about to be cut off by the guillotine motion. The whole thing is farcical.

If people have a criminal intent, why should they bother to raid a gun club for a .22 when they could perfectly well buy a .38 or a .44 illegally?

Mr. Howard: I have sought to answer that point. It is the same point as was put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells. I do not think that the world is divided quite as neatly as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) suggests, into those who are prepared to engage in illegal conduct and who would undoubtedly take advantage of the fact that illegal guns are available, and those who behave lawfully and would not stray from the law at all. Others who do not fit neatly into that category would be tempted by the circumstances that I have sought to explain. I think that that justifies our approach.

There has been a good deal of discussion of the advice that the Government have received on this issue from the Forensic Science Service. It believes that it would be an extremely difficult task to police these procedures fully and effectively at club level. The procedures would not provide a guaranteed measure of assurance against the possible misuse of a pistol by a determined individual.

The Government have also taken advice from the Association of Chief Police Officers of England and Wales. It concludes that

"disassembly is incapable of being policed."

It too has concerns about a club policing this policy and there would be little to stop a person having two slides, one at a club and one at home. The smallness of these parts makes them easily concealable. The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland has similar concerns about disassembly providing insufficient safeguards for the public. Thomas Hamilton and Michael Ryan both held their guns lawfully. Either could have been capable of obtaining or concealing component parts had the disassembly approach been enforced.

It has been argued that the Government have gone further than Lord Cullen proposed. In one sense, that is true: Lord Cullen would have permitted single-shot handguns to be kept in the home. In relation to multi-shot handguns, he said:

"in stating my own conclusions I should confine myself to what I recommend should be considered . . . I recommend that consideration should be given to restricting the availability of self-loading pistols and revolvers of any calibre . . . Preferably this should be done by their disablement while they are not in use . . . If for any reason that course is not to be followed, I see no alternative to considering the more draconian alternative of a ban on multi-shot handguns . . . directed to the possession of such handguns by individual owners."

The Government have not gone as far as the alternative course that Cullen has envisaged. The Bill will permit the continued possession by individuals of .22 calibre handguns, provided that they are kept at licensed pistol clubs.

The Government have taken the view that the protection of the public should be the priority. The safest position must be to ensure that the entire gun is stored in secure licensed pistol clubs.

5 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The debate is about a judgment that the House must make between what exact form of legislation is likely to be the most effective and the rights of the shooting community, balanced against the protection of the public. It is true that the Government and Opposition Front Benchers take a similar approach with the amendment, as will be the case in relation to the next group of amendments. That does not in any way mean that the Government and the Opposition are at one in dealing with the legislation. We both recognise that legislation is necessary because of public demand for action, but there is a difference between our position, which is that there should be a complete ban on handguns, and the Government's position, which is that there should be a ban on guns above .22 calibre. However, we have accepted that the need for legislation on other aspects in the Bill takes priority over our particular position at this time, although we have made commitments in relation to the future. That is why we believe that it is necessary for the Bill to be given passage through Parliament so that it becomes law before the general election.

The Lords amendment would undermine the whole premise of the Bill. It takes the Bill in a different direction. The argument between the Government and the Opposition is on which guns should be banned and which should not. The amendment essentially bans no guns and suggests a different way in which to deal with the problem.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Does my hon. Friend accept that, if the amendment on disassembly had been accepted in the first place, we would have had what the Opposition wanted: a total ban on all whole working guns outside gun clubs? It is the simplest, most

straightforward way of achieving that. In failing to achieve the amendment, we have lost the main part of the argument, which is to ban all guns outside gun clubs.

Mr. Henderson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, but I do not accept the logic of his argument. There would have been no guarantee that the Government would have accepted that position, even if Opposition Front Benchers had accepted some of the views that were expressed by Labour Members and indeed by Conservative Members, but, in any case, as the Home Secretary showed, such an amendment would not have led to the protection of the public from the use of assembled guns.

Whether we like it or not, vested interests have come into the debate at all stages. We all know that we are dealing with the amendment because of the vote of hereditary peers in another place. If the matter had been left to life peers and others who hold office ex officio there, the result would have been different, so the point that was made by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South–West (Mr. Budgen) that the peers would have taken a different attitude if this had been about toff shooting rather than the common man shooting does not hold up to examination because, in that instance, the peers have tried to defend a vested interest against the rightful demands of the public.

The argument against disassembling is that it is too easy to obtain a working gun from the parts. It is too easy for someone who has a will to find parts that are interchangeable with the other parts to which they have access.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the demands of the public, where does he stand on capital punishment, as it is clear that the demands of the public would bring that back?

Mr. Henderson: I am not sure that I would agree with the hon. Gentleman on that. If a full debate took place on that matter, the result would be different, but the point at debate here is that Parliament is focusing on the maximum agreement that can possibly be achieved to meet a public demand and to protect the public. What we are arguing about is the extent to which a judgment has to be passed by Parliament on different aspects—the rights of the shooters against the demands of the public and their right to be protected.

The great danger is that, if we do not get this right, the maniac or the person who is unstable and has access to the parts of a gun can assemble a gun and take the same action as we know was taken by the Dunblane murderer.

Mr. Frank Cook: The irresponsible maniac my hon. Friend refers to surely would not have a firearms certificate to start with and would not be allowed membership of a club, so the justification that is being advanced applies not to gun club members but to illegal people who act outside the law. My hon. Friend is trying to justify one thing by quoting something that does not apply to it.

Mr. Henderson: I do not accept my hon. Friend's argument. The point about the maniac is that it is not obvious that someone is a maniac until he takes some mad action that causes great harm and injury to other members of the public. It is a matter of having regulations and rules that protect the public in between the point where a maniac or a mentally unstable person thinks of taking some action and actually takes that action.

Sir Anthony Grant (South–West Cambridgeshire): The really determined maniac will not bother about assembling a gun. He will go to any pub in the east end and illegally buy a gun that has been imported from behind the iron curtain. Thousands are available illegally.

Mr. Henderson: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point and we need to take action to toughen up on the illegal holding of guns, but that matter is outside the scope of the debate.

Conservative Members made a point on the question of temptation. In his defence of the Government's position, the Home Secretary said that, where the main barrel was separated from the trigger mechanism, there would be a temptation for someone to break the law. Conservative Members said that it was not a sufficient position for the Home Secretary to defend and that that would not prevent temptation.

I think that the Home Secretary missed the real point, which is made in a submission by the Government's forensic scientist. In a letter to the Home Office dated 18 November 1996, which was made available by the Minister of State in a previous debate, he says:

"This procedure would not provide a guaranteed measure of assurance against the possible misuse of the pistol by a determined and motivated individual . . . Some individuals will possess more than one set of barrel and slide components for their pistol, or possess components which allow the calibre of the weapon to be converted by the simple substitution of components."

It also says, and this is the key point:

"unless a club employs a qualified armourer to confirm the bona fide of items at the time of transfer for storage who is also fully aware of the extent of ownership of such accessories by their membership a person could still possess a complete weapon at home even after apparently complying with the regulations."

If the system suggested in Lords amendment No. 8 is introduced, there will be complete confusion in gun clubs about who owns what and which part relates to which gun. Those involved will know about the confusion and that could tempt the person on the verge of taking action such as that in Dunblane into breaking the law. That is why we resisted the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) in previous debates, and it is the key argument against the Lords amendment.

Dame Jill Knight: The key argument, for those of us in favour of the Lords amendment, is that if whole guns are kept in one place, that place would be a magnet for the IRA and other gangs. If only a part of a gun is stored at a gun club, the criminals will not know where the other part is, because they will not know the members or who owns which gun. Would it not be more difficult to obtain guns from a gun club if they were split up? That is the crux of the argument.

Mr. Henderson: I accept the point that the hon. Lady is trying to establish, but she is wrong. The legislation is geared towards preventing the mentally unstable, the

[Mr. Henderson]

maniacs and freaks from abusing legally held guns. I accept that there is some risk that gun clubs will be a focus for criminals if whole guns are kept there, but I hope that the legislation will be tight enough to ensure that gun clubs have sufficient security to make them difficult to penetrate. The hon. Lady's point about the IRA is not relevant, because it can obtain guns, in this country and elsewhere, more easily than by raiding premises that are registered with the police and are heavily alarmed. Such a raid would be a high-profile exercise and dangerous for such an organisation. The hon. Lady's argument cannot be sustained.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose—*

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate) *rose—*

Mr. Frank Cook *rose—*

Mr. Henderson: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) and then I shall proceed.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman mentioned public safety. Would not those who live near gun clubs feel that their safety was jeopardised by the closeness of all those weapons, which were capable of being fired and which could fall into the hands of criminals?

5.15 pm

Mr. Henderson: As all hon. Members know, people are concerned when anything changes in their community, but the hon. Gentleman's argument is not valid. The chances that a maniac or unstable person could breach the security of a gun club and then use the gun in the immediate locale are low. The location of gun clubs is not significant.

Mr. Frank Cook: My hon. Friend made the point that there are many easier ways for the IRA to obtain firearms than by raiding a gun club. If that is so, can he tell me why the IRA saw fit to raid the armoury of the Parachute Regiment and loot it so effectively?

Mr. Henderson: That is a different situation. I cannot recall the detail of that event, but the judgment of the IRA must have been that the armoury was a relatively easy target, presumably because nobody expected that it would take such a risk. I do not believe that the IRA or similar organisations have a great need for .22 handguns. If they did want such weapons, there would be easier ways to obtain them.

I know that other hon. Members wish to speak, but I wish to emphasise that temptation would be caused by the chaos that would be created by a badly policed, bureaucratic system. People who wanted access to guns would know that the system did not work. That point was made by the British Shooting Sports Council in its evidence to the Cullen inquiry, and Lord Kimball, who was the chairman of the Firearms Consultative Committee from 1989 to 1994, said on Second Reading in another place:

"I can no longer support disassembly as a method of secure storage in the home."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 December 1996; Vol. 576, c. 1317.]

In evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee, a representative of the Association of Chief Police Officers also said that it did not believe that disassembly would be a safe way to protect the public.

The public demand to feel safe. When public concern is recognised by the House, we have a duty to take action and do our best, having weighed up the arguments, to provide legislation before the general election that will give the public some confidence that the likelihood of a repetition of the tragic events in Dunblane last year will be minimised. I hope that the House will approve the Bill tonight and that another place will accept our decision that action should be taken quickly.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary presented one of the worst cases for an amendment that I have heard in the House, but the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) made an even worse case. As the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said earlier, when those who sit on the Front Benches get together, let the citizens beware. That has never been more true than on this occasion.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North mentioned public opinion. Public opinion had not been measured much until the Duke of Edinburgh made a statement about the Bill just before Christmas, after which three polls were carried out. One had 2,780 callers, of whom 68 per cent. agreed with the Duke of Edinburgh. The GMTV poll had 10,000 callers, of whom 75 per cent. agreed with him, and the Sky news poll had 7,000 callers, with 72 per cent. agreeing with him. That is a convincing statement of public opinion. My postbag, which I accept is probably prejudiced, contains many letters that strongly criticise the Bill, and I am not dissatisfied that public opinion is strongly against the legislation.

Mr. Salmond: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that, in a response to those polls on the "Today" programme, it was pointed out that shooting lobby members were using the Internet to ask people to phone in repeatedly by pushing a button? Given that many hon. Members discounted the results of a phone-in television poll on the monarchy—which received more responses and was a much wider survey of opinion in Scotland—and the manipulation to which polls can be subject, is he seriously telling us that such polls are a reliable indicator of public opinion?

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I suppose that, remarkably, the Snowdrop poll was in no way organised. The truth is that the moment a poll is not agreed with, everyone rushes to a conclusion on why there should be some inaccuracy in it. On the hon. Gentleman's point about the "Today" programme, the e-mail message had been placed on the Internet a quarter of an hour after the poll closed. He may believe that shooters are so well organised that they can persuade 20,000 people to respond to a poll, but I must say—as fond as I am of them all—that they are not in that category.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): My hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary read out some information

that was available yesterday on the web site of the Sportsmans Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in which threats were made to Conservative Members that revenge would be taken if they do not vote in a certain way. The message on that web site requests and expects that, in the next week, 80,000 letters will be sent on behalf of the shooting lobby. If the hon. Gentleman's postbag is anything like mine, he will know that a disproportionate number of letters can be generated by a very small number of self-interested people.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I am beginning to wonder if some of my colleagues in the debate have been in the House for only five minutes. Have hon. Members never received letters threatening not to vote for us? I should imagine that almost every day I receive a letter saying that someone will not vote for me for one reason or another. That has been going on for a good few years, and they still send such letters. Nevertheless, people threaten. I find nothing wrong in attempting to motivate a lobby—any more than the Snowdrop people deliberately went round and motivated their lobby.

The point that I was trying to make is that I remain satisfied that the vast majority of public opinion—nigh on two thirds or more—firmly believes that the Bill will not satisfy the first requirement: to stop the occurrence of another Dunblane. We should put our minds to that requirement and to that alone.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has quoted Cullen's recommendation. The fact is that Cullen was perfectly content with dismantlement if such action was practical. In the debate on the Bill's Second Reading, the Home Secretary said:

"The Government took advice from the Forensic Science Service on the practicability of disabling multi-shot handguns. It concluded that the way forward was unworkable."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 175.]

That conclusion rather surprised those who hold our view. We undertook some work on the matter, and we persuaded the Government. Lady Blatch said:

"We do not deny that many pistols can be disassembled by removing some essential component such as the slide assembly or cylinder."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 January 1997; Vol. 576, c. 337.]

So the practicality argument went down the sink.

The new objection was that the disassembly approach

"has the fundamental flaw that, to put it mildly, it would not be difficult for a gun owner to keep an illicit spare at home."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 784.]

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has made that argument again today. What he means is that it is somehow easier to break the law with a part than with a whole gun. However, buying a spare slide assembly or cylinder requires the consent of the local chief officer of police, as he has to grant a variation of the original certificate. There is absolutely no difference between buying another gun and buying a replacement slide or cylinder, as both are strictly controlled by the law.

The Home Secretary's statement also misses the point that the number of illegal guns in the United Kingdom exceeds the number of legal ones. It is easier for a criminal to buy an illegal whole pistol than to buy a legal slide assembly or cylinder.

The Government raised three objections on policing a disassembly system for clubs. The first was that a qualified armourer would have to check the bona fides of a component part. However, there is no great difficulty in identifying a bona fide component part. The extent of ownership will also be known because it will be declared on a firearms certificate.

The second objection was that an owner could deceive a club official by depositing a deactivated component. However, that is based on the highly contentious idea that deactivated weapons are not easily identified. Deactivated weapons undergo a stringent process to render them incapable of firing a missile. All component parts are deactivated by such means as cutting away two thirds of the slide rail, and all require a distinctive proof mark issued by the Birmingham proof house or the London proof house. Anyone accustomed to handling guns would easily be able to spot the difference.

The third objection was that there would be considerable bureaucracy in managing the system in clubs. I do not know why a disassembly system should entail any more bureaucracy than the system envisaged in the Bill; I think that the contrary is true. Depositing component parts would work in exactly the same way as depositing whole guns.

The argument has already been made, but I will make it again, that a cache—whether it is in a strong room, concrete container or steel box—is surely a greater target for a robber than a box with a few spare parts. If any hon. Member disagrees with that, they should examine the quarry industry and investigate the difficulties that it has had in keeping its explosive stores secure—particularly in remote places, where it has had great difficulty in stopping those with nefarious intent breaking into its stores.

Mr. Marlow: I should tell my hon. Friend that, when I was at Sandhurst—which I presume was a rather more secure place than many gun clubs would be—we were required to keep the working parts of guns in a completely different place from the weapons themselves, to stop robbers from getting at them.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: As the hon. Member for Stockton, North said, if the amendment were to be accepted, the weapon would never be whole except in a licensed rifle club.

Among the various bits and pieces that have been sent to me, I received a copy of a cutting from the *News of the World*. It claimed—perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend will tell me whether it is true—that 12 full-bore pistols had been taken from police in Luton, Bedfordshire, but that the matter had been hushed up and was under investigation. That may or may not be true although, as it came from the *News of the World*, I am perfectly prepared to accept that it is not.

It is quite clear that all the Government's objections to dismantlement simply do not stand up to scrutiny. I believe that dismantling has some benefits.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South–West): One of the great advantages of disassembly is that it would considerably reduce the compensation bill. If, at some later stage, we finish up discovering that the European Court of Human Rights—particularly once the convention is incorporated into our domestic law, perhaps under a Labour Government—requires us to pay

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

£500 million, which is eight times the cost of Britannia, for this little ill-considered measure, we shall all feel that this is a pretty bad evening's work.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I hate to pick holes in my hon. Friend's argument, but we are talking only about .22s. Disassembly would indeed be cheaper for the taxpayer, because more shooters would be able to continue their sport and more clubs would remain open. Clubs will still require a good measure of security, but not the fortress approach that will be required to store arsenals of fully assembled working guns. He is right, but perhaps not on the figures that he mentioned.

I believe that disassembly would be safer for the public, and I have already mentioned the two alternatives on security. The shooting fraternity would also be able to practise its sport much more easily. Given that the Government have removed the .32 from legal possession, which will exclude us from many international competitions, we shall be very restricted in the competitions that we can enter. We owe it to our shooters—who have done very well in winning gold medals and other awards in all types of shooting—to help them as much as possible.

What really hurts and comes through in all the letters that I have received is that, fundamentally, the Bill expresses distrust in the honest, law-abiding shooter. The amendment expresses further distrust. It seems ridiculous, because we know in our heart of hearts that it was not the gun that was responsible but the man. This extension, this quibble and this argument seem quite unnecessary. I believe that we should accept Lords amendment No. 8, and be grateful for it.

5.30 pm

Mr. Salmond: In a parliamentary first earlier, I found myself in favour of a guillotine motion—something I have never experienced in my entire parliamentary career. I am now going to commit another first by saying that the Home Secretary said something rather important towards the end of his speech—something I am sure I have never said in my parliamentary career.

The Home Secretary identified a fallacy that has gained some currency, particularly among the ranks of Conservative Members. It is that Lord Cullen unambiguously recommended the disablement of handguns. Lord Cullen did no such thing. The Home Secretary referred to the recommendation in the Cullen report that multi-shot handguns should be dealt with

"preferably by their disablement . . . or, if such a system is not adopted, by the banning of the possession of such handguns by individual owners".

The Home Secretary often claimed that Government were going further than Lord Cullen, but—as he accurately said today—they are not.

The Home Secretary is in some difficulty, because there are some aspects of logic that are difficult to defend in his proposals. His central difficulty is that he has made a distinction between weapons over .22 calibre and .22 weapons, despite the fact that many .22 weapons can be multi-shot and just as dangerous under certain circumstances as weapons of a higher calibre.

The intellectual difficulty that the Home Secretary is experiencing is identified by that dubious distinction. It would have been more sensible to bite the bullet and to grasp the logic of Lord Cullen's recommendation. Once the Home Secretary properly decided not to go for the disablement option, because of its weaknesses, the Government should have followed Lord Cullen's recommendation for all multi-shot weapons, and should not have allowed .22 weapons to continue to be used in licensed gun premises.

A recurrent argument in the debate has been the question of licensed premises becoming arsenals and attractive to terrorists or criminals. If that is a genuine concern on the part of some Conservative Members—let us assume that it is—the amendment that should have come from another place is not the one before us this evening. The amendment proposes to remove the exempt categories of weapons and to go for the disablement option.

If the genuine fear was that gun clubs would become arsenals and subject to raids by terrorists and other factions, the amendment that should have been tabled would have proposed the disablement of .22 multi-shot weapons and would not have allowed any weapons to be kept at home. In other words, we should have gone further than the Government's proposal.

Mr. Frank Cook: It may be that I am referring to a different set of documents, but I thought that that was exactly what we were discussing.

Mr. Salmond: The recommendation from the Lords is to remove the categories of banned weapons and to identify the disablement option, which would allow the bulk of the gun to be kept at home and the firing mechanism to be stored in a gun club.

Mr. Cook: That is for .22 weapons.

Mr. Salmond: I am trying to suggest to the hon. Gentleman that, for .22 weapons, if the major part of the gun was in a gun club and the firing mechanism was elsewhere, it could be considered a strengthening of the legislation. I am subject to correction by the Home Secretary, but the amendment proposes to allow the bulk of the gun to be retained at home, while the firing mechanism or other part is retained in a gun club. I am suggesting that if the amendment were the other way round—so that the bulk of the gun would be retained in the gun club while the mechanism was elsewhere—a valid argument could be made that that would strengthen rather than weaken the legislation.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Such an amendment was tabled on Report.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman must allow me to discuss the amendment before us, as opposed to previous amendments tabled on Report. My proposition, as he well knows, is to ban all .22 weapons and all other calibres of handgun. I have identified that as the right way forward, and it is a proposition that I continue to defend. I was trying first to examine the Home Secretary's position, and then the position of hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). He has

come to my aid and agreed with me during many fishing debates, but unfortunately we are bound to disagree on this subject.

If there was a genuine concern not to weaken the legislation and not to emerge with further loopholes, the amendment before us would have been the other way round. It is possible to argue that such an amendment would have strengthened the legislation, but—as the Home Secretary rightly said—the amendment undoubtedly weakens it. Therefore, I will be happy to commit another parliamentary first by joining the Home Secretary in the Lobby this evening.

Sir Patrick Cormack: It seems to me that the amendment imparts a little clarity into the most muddled piece of legislation that this House has had to consider for many a long year. I would like to make some brief points.

No one for a moment doubts the sincerity of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) but, quite honestly, his was a very confused speech. When I intervened to ask him whether he would support the return of the death penalty if public opinion demanded it, he skated around the subject. The fact is that the House sometimes has to stand out against public opinion. It is the job of the House to legislate fairly and decently, and in the interests of our constituents. We can then answer to them at the subsequent general election. To try to follow public opinion—determining what it is by all sorts of inexact science—is not the function of a mature Parliament or of responsible parliamentarians.

Who are we seeking to catch with this legislation? We are seeking to make it more difficult for criminals—or to use the phrase of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North, "maniacs and lunatics"—to run amok with weapons. It has been said in this and other debates here and in another place that criminals will find ways of purchasing weapons, and my hon. Friend the Member for South–West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) referred to east end pubs and elsewhere. They will continue to commit diabolical crimes, and it is important that we have a police system that can seek to anticipate those criminal actions, and a criminal justice system that can seek to deal with those who perpetrate crimes when they have been caught. No one could dissent from either of these propositions.

What of the maniac or the lunatic? There is no legislation that we or any other assembly can devise that can deal adequately with the maniac. What if a maniac runs amok with a shotgun, rather than a handgun? An interesting article by Matthew Parris in *The Times* the other day suggested that, within a few years, the hidden agenda would become all too apparent and we would be banning shotguns. During a previous debate, I intervened on my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor)—I am sorry he is not here now—and asked him what his attitude would have been had the crime been committed with a shotgun. I asked whether he would be looking to ban them. Honestly, immediately and instinctively, he replied that perhaps he would.

The House cannot go down that road, yet we are. In doing so, we are punishing for the sins and crimes of an individual a group of the most law-abiding and responsible people in this country. It is disgraceful that we should even contemplate doing that.

Of course one has to react to a crime as horrible and terrible as that at Dunblane, and of course one has to look at what should be done to make it more and more difficult for the Thomas Hamiltons of this world to possess weapons. However, the blame lies not with the law, but with the careless action of those who did not listen when they were warned that the man was a trifle odd, to put it mildly, and allowed him to have his certificate and his weapons. Our reaction does a grave injustice to many law-abiding people who have been following a legitimate sport, in some cases for many years.

It is too late to go back over the debates that we had before Christmas. We should concentrate on making the Bill a little tidier, a little clearer and a little less unfair. The Lords amendments would do that. We should approve the amendments that impart tidiness and we should endorse those that bring in a little fairness. In so doing, we would redress a balance that we are guilty of getting grossly wrong.

Mr. Frank Cook: If we accepted all the amendments this evening, we would not make good law; we would just make a law less bad than it was. The case for dismantling is plain. I have made it before in the Chamber. I do not want to repeat everything that I have said on the subject. The consequence of not accepting dismantling will be fewer and fewer gun clubs. Clubs will be more widely dispersed and they will have arsenals in them. That must be so if the Bill goes through as it stands.

It is iniquitous that people with an interest in target shooting should be penalised. I have every sympathy with the residents of Dunblane and residents of Hungerford. Nobody has a monopoly on that distress. Sometimes, people talk as though they have—they have not.

The Home Secretary has responsibility throughout the United Kingdom for the efficiency and expertise of the police. I care about target shooters. Theirs is a bona fide, international sport. Our sportsmen and women have brought credit to this country.

What about the men and women on the beat who are entrusted with a firearms responsibility? They have to practise that expertise and hone it to proficiency standard. What time do they get, and where can they go? They cannot practise on official ranges, they cannot use official weapons and they cannot do it in official time. None of that is permitted. Of their own dedication, they acquire weapons, join a club and practise in their own time to maintain their skills.

What is the Home Secretary going to do about that? There will be fewer clubs to go to, and those people will not be able to hold legally the weapons that they are required to be able to use proficiently. Defeating the Lords amendment on dismantling will mean that there will be fewer clubs. The Home Secretary has a direct responsibility. I hope that he is taking it seriously.

5.45 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I very much regret being at odds with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I shall vote for the Lords amendment on disassembly because it would implement Lord Cullen's original recommendations. I am rather shocked and dismayed that the Government ignored the original recommendation.

[Mr. Graham Riddick]

As the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) has pointed out, no one has a monopoly on sympathy for those who have suffered so appallingly as a result of the actions of Thomas Hamilton. Like everybody else, I was deeply shocked and appalled at what happened. However, I must ask my right hon. and learned Friend whether he thinks it sensible to be at odds with so many of his Back Benchers—his supporters in his party.

I do not appreciate the fact that my party was bounced into the Bill by a few members of the Cabinet. We had no opportunity to consider the Cullen report and our response to its recommendations. I have never voted for the Bill. One reason for that is that the shooting community has been betrayed. While Cullen was conducting his inquiry, members of that community were told not to rock the boat. They demonstrated a great deal of self-restraint. They were told that they would have an opportunity to put their case to the politicians. They did not have that opportunity, because we were all bounced into the Bill. The House of Lords has merely injected some balance into it.

We have heard from hon. Members on both sides that the refusal to follow Cullen's recommendations on disassembly is a response to public opinion. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Weston–super–Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) referred to the three polls, conducted after the Duke of Edinburgh's comments, that showed that public opinion was not as polarised as has been suggested. People recognise that the shooting community is being discriminated against. I am sorry that the Government have not taken that into consideration. The Government's preferred option will put most gun clubs out of business, because of the massive cost of implementing the security measures.

The Bill already stops many shooters carrying out their legitimate pastimes. The amendment is a moderate attempt to inject some fairness. It would be much safer for unusable parts of a gun to be stored in separate places, rather than arsenals of working guns being held in clubs. That point has been made several times; surely the House should take note of it.

The taxpayer could also be saved considerable sums, because the compensation bills would not be as high. We have not heard many people talking on behalf of the shooters. If the Lords amendment is accepted, more people will be able to continue their sport, because more clubs will be able to remain open.

This morning, I received a letter from the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), in response to a letter that I wrote to her in October. I am grateful for her response. She replied to several points that I had raised. She said:

"A determined or motivated individual could find it easy to obtain an illicit spare part."

A determined or motivated individual could find it easy to obtain a handgun. As my hon. Friend the Member for South–West Cambridgeshire (Sir A. Grant) has said, someone so motivated could go to many pubs in London and buy a handgun.

The Bill ignores that reality. It discriminates against a group of people who enjoy a legitimate pastime. The House of Commons and the Conservative party will rue the day that the Bill was forced through Parliament.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I shall keep my remarks short because of the guillotine. In his opening remarks, the Home Secretary was squirming in his efforts to deal with the points raised by Conservative Members and one or two Labour Members. I heard him recognising the logic of the point advanced by the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat–Amory) and he failed to deal with the problem raised by the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett–Bowman). I could not help but reflect that he would not have found himself in that uncomfortable position, had we found time to discuss the Cullen report before the headlong rush into legislation. If even so trained a legal mind as his is unable to deal with those points now, I cannot help but reflect that we would have done far better to have considered the practical and technical arguments and even tested public opinion on the proposal advanced by Lord Cullen before we embarked on this ill-considered legislation.

Mr. John Carlisle: If that was the case, why did the Liberal Democrat party jump the gun, if I may use that phrase, by saying that it would ban all handguns, before the Cullen report was even published?

Mr. Harvey: In all truth, uniquely among the parties in this case, our party took the time to read the Cullen report before arriving at any conclusions. We then advanced on the basis of a free vote. Many such as myself who fundamentally disagree with the principle of the legislation because of the way that it is framed, none the less voted for the option of an all-out ban, because we realised that that was more logical than the muddle that forms the basis of the legislation.

The amendment under consideration would be a better option than either and I shall continue to consider disassembly, which has been proven in our debate to be the best option available. The so-called experts who initially said that it was impractical have largely been answered. Some of the more recent arguments against the disassembly option also seem largely to have been dealt with.

We are being asked to consider the suggestion that law-abiding, respectable citizens, who are members of gun clubs, will resort to the most bizarre steps imaginable to conceal various pieces of equipment, pretend that they are other things, substitute one for another and do all sorts of other things. Why on earth would anyone bother to go to the trouble of doing all those things when, as has been said time and again, it would be far easier simply to go to the continent and get hold of a gun, or to go to any of the innumerable establishments in the underworld to procure one? It seems far more likely that someone who was determined to have a weapon would resort to one of those easier and less complex ways, to get one.

It has been suggested that the arrangement for disassembly would be bureaucratic and hard to administer. I do not see why it would be any more so than the proposed legislation. The bureaucracy, such as it is, would provide useful safeguards, which would enable the police to check properly and would mean that we knew who had got what, where and for what purpose.

The practical arguments against disassembly simply do not hold water. Disassembled pistols would be far safer than the arsenals of complete guns that we are proposing. If clubs are a target, arsenals would be a much more attractive target than somewhere that had only half the item stored in it. The disassembly option would allow thousands of clubs to continue to operate, would save a sport for thousands of people—both able-bodied people and the many disabled people who find that this is a sport in which they are uniquely able to participate—and would save the taxpayer a huge amount of money. Also, it would meet the central purpose of the Bill, which is to separate the owner of a gun from that gun, except within licensed premises, and to do everything possible to avoid another terrible tragedy along the lines of Dunblane. As drafted, the Bill would practically eliminate the sporting use of pistols and would provide only a negligible increase in public safety.

Mr. John Carlisle: I apologise to the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) if I embarrassed him in some way about the stance that he honourably took against that taken by his colleagues in the Liberal Democrat party. Let it be put on the record that they talked about banning all handguns before the Cullen report was published. As far as embarrassment is concerned, I am with him, on the basis that I have been acutely embarrassed by this legislation and will continue to be so.

Mr. Howard: Characteristically, my hon. Friend is being far too generous to the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey), who did not disagree with his party, but voted with his colleagues for a total ban. I understand the views of those of my hon. Friends and of the few Opposition Members who objected to a total ban and are in favour of the amendment, but does my hon. Friend agree that there is no case whatever for the view taken by the hon. Member for North Devon, who voted for a total ban and now seeks to represent all sides of the argument by apparently voting for disassembly?

Mr. Carlisle: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. However, at a time when we who disagreed with both Front-Bench spokesmen are looking for every friend we can get, a voice in the wilderness that may translate into a vote in the Lobby in a few moments is to be welcomed.

Sir Anthony Grant: I think that my hon. Friend and, probably, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, will want to be completely fair to the Liberal Democrat party. It should be pointed out that the one member of that party who knows something about this subject—the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)—actually voted against.

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend has put the matter succinctly—may the Liberal Democrats be keepers of their own conscience.

This has been an extraordinary debate, particularly the performances from the Front Bench. I am interested in the new thesis of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, that temptation must now be a basis for law. I have often been tempted in my short political career in this place—sadly, about to end—to think that I might sit where he does. Obviously, I know that I have his protection and that of the other law makers in this place, should such a wayward thought ever cross my mind. Perhaps that gives him and the Opposition Front-Bench team an idea of the fact that they are totally wrong and unfair to reject the reasonable Lords amendment. After all, it is only a tiny amendment compared to that which many of us would have wished their Lordships to put forward—disassembly of all handguns, including .33s, which would have put a coach and horses through the Bill and made it totally unworkable, in my right hon. and learned Friend's mind.

The Lords amendment is a modest measure, but it would give enormous comfort to the few supporters we have left who still trust us on this legislation, on the basis that we would at least be giving them some form of succour, in what has been a thoroughly bad, ill-thought-out and ill-prepared Bill.

Other colleagues have mentioned cost. In my constituency, the leading gun club is in the heart of the town. That is not exactly the leafy suburbs of my constituency—I do not think that there are any trees to have leaves on in that part. It is mainly a council area, where people are struggling to make ends meet. That club will undoubtedly have to close if we do not accept the Lords amendments. It seems logical that, by disassembling the guns in the way proposed, we shall not only put a stop to the arsenal of weapons that exists now, which is necessary, but avoid the enormous costs of the fortresses that will have to be built.

As the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said, gun clubs will necessarily be fewer and fewer. The British Shooting Sports Council has estimated that nearly 67 per cent. of clubs will go out of business if this amendment is not accepted. It must weigh on the conscience of all hon. Members that we are taking from those honest and reasonable constituents, many of whom are our supporters but who are sadly disillusioned by the legislation, that chance to keep their sport.

To conclude, as I know that time is short, the situation that we now face with disassembly, particularly with the Commonwealth games, is ludicrous. Because of the legislation, competitors from abroad at the Manchester games will be able to bring in a calibre of gun that is far greater than that which we have discussed this evening and which will be illegal, except if special exemption is made. Our own sportsmen and sportswomen, who have enormous prowess in the sport, will not be able to practise with those guns in this country and will have to go abroad; that is totally ludicrous.

Even at this stage, a special exception could be made for the sportsmen and sportswomen who want to represent their country, as they have done in the past with such dignity and success, and who will now have to jump on an aeroplane or a ship and go abroad to practise so that they can compete in the Commonwealth games. What a farce—and what a farce, frankly, the whole Bill has become.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary must listen to the voices from the Government Benches—and the brave voices from the Opposition—if we are not to face an electoral disaster. I warn him that that could easily happen in many marginal seats if we passed the legislation.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Carlisle: No, I must conclude because others wish to speak.

I ask my right hon. and learned Friend even at this late stage to consider accepting the amendment.

6 pm

Mr. Barnes: It is quite unbelievable that in supporting the amendment I find myself aligned with the hon. Members for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) and for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle), the Duke of Edinburgh, hereditary peers and the shooting community. Those are not people whom I would regard as my natural political allies, but I believe that the logic of dismantling is overwhelming.

I should have preferred the amendment to be the other way round, so that the slide assembly or cylinder were held at home, but it is the best proposal that we have, and it is in line with the general principle that dismantling has always been a sensible provision. That idea was put to us by Cullen, and we should have had a chance to discuss it in the House and to sort out our ideas before legislation was rushed through.

The Dunblane parents wrote to me, as they probably did to every Member of Parliament. I met them in what was probably my most harrowing experience as a Member of Parliament, having to defend a position that they opposed, when all my sympathy went with them rather than with the individuals whom I mentioned earlier as being associated with me on the matter. In the end, I replied to the letter in considerable detail, explaining my position.

I believe that dismantling is the best possible solution to the problem that confronts us, given that the Government have insisted on their position about .22 calibre weapons. The logic operated throughout, and is back with us in the amendment. I am pleased that the gun lobby is on board in arguing for dismantling, because I thought that once it had lost the argument on general principle, it might fall back to the position of .22s being placed in gun clubs. There are, however, other arguments, such as that concerning the difficulty of establishing sufficiently secure gun clubs, which affect the interests of the gun lobby.

I am disappointed with the position being taken by Labour Front Benchers, because they have stood on their head to some extent on the matter of gun clubs. They now tell us that gun clubs are more or less safe, whereas on Second Reading their argument for the total ban on handguns was based on the premise that the Government's proposal of placing .22s in gun clubs was not acceptable and that all sorts of dangers were associated with it. They have decided to agree with the Government, and have not followed through the logic of their original position.

The argument is solidly established, even for people such as myself, who have never been associated in any way with gun club culture or activity, but have all along considered dismantling to be the answer to an extremely difficult problem. We have a chance to do something about that tonight.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I support the amendment. I believe that we are dealing with an entirely legitimate sport, pursued by responsible individuals, which teaches discipline and self-control. Through the legislation, the House is removing or curtailing an activity that has previously been lawful, and removing private property that up to now has been lawfully held. The House should be extremely cautious about doing that.

I have visited gun clubs in my constituency and I am convinced that the disassembly option is safe and feasible and would save a considerable quantity of public money. After taking a considerable amount of evidence about disassembly, Lord Cullen concluded:

> "I am satisfied that the dismantling of self-loading pistols and revolvers would in general be practicable."

In response, the Government produced only one objection. They said:

> "While removal of key components is feasible for certain types of guns, it is not a practical proposition for others."

I agree with that. The measure would not apply for the 5 or 10 per cent. of pistols for which it is not practicable, but for the other 95 per cent. it is a practicable option, as found by Cullen and as admitted, by implication, in the Government's initial response.

In an intervention on my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, I pointed out that the argument that a pistol owner could obtain illegally another slide assembly, and therefore a complete pistol, was pretty thin: someone driven to do that would find it much easier to obtain an entire pistol, most likely from the very large reservoir of entirely illegally held weapons, which are unaffected by the legislation. He said, very fairly, that he saw the force in that argument, so I would ask him to follow that through and accept the amendment.

Surely the House stands up for minorities. Does not liberty, which we defend in the House, entail supporting at times unpopular causes? I think that the legislation is in parts mistaken and that we have an opportunity this evening to go one small step towards meeting the legitimate aspirations of the majority of legitimate sportsmen who use guns, by accepting the disassembly option.

Mr. Howard: I agree strongly with my right hon. and hon. Friends who have said that those who currently engage in the activity of shooting are overwhelmingly law-abiding, decent people. I entirely understand the concerns that have been expressed at the extent to which they are likely to be affected by the legislation.

I entirely reject the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) that a majority of those who voted for the amendment in another place, or my hon. Friends, were merely seeking to defend vested interests. That is very far from the case, and the allegation was unworthy.

I also reject the hon. Gentleman's argument that we should be motivated in placing this or any other legislation on the statute book primarily by a consideration of where the balance of popular opinion lies. That is certainly a factor to be taken into account, but it should not be the only factor. I thought that the intervention on him by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) had much force. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman gave my hon. Friend a satisfactory response.

Mr. Henderson: Perhaps I can give a more satisfactory response now. That was not what I was saying. I argued that the House must do what is right and practical, but that in this instance, public opinion demands that we take action quickly, which is why it is important that we proceed with the Bill now.

Mr. Howard: As the hon. Gentleman says, we have to do what is right and practical. Therefore, the argument turns on the difference between the point of view expressed in questions put to me by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory)—on which he expanded in his speech—and by other hon. Members, and my response to them. My right hon. Friend mentioned my response to this point in the debate, I think, on Second Reading, but he did not read on. Had he done so, he would have found that, at that early stage, I dealt with the essential argument that if disassembly were accepted, there would be no satisfactory way of controlling the illicit use of parts of guns to make a whole gun. My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) suggested that the Government had introduced that argument at a later stage. That is not the case; it was part of our argument from the very beginning.

The point is perhaps most explicitly and succinctly expressed by the Association of Chief Police Officers of England and Wales, which stated that

"disassembly is incapable of being policed."

Coming from that source, that opinion is not lightly to be set aside. I fully accept that the balance of the argument on the amendments is a difficult judgment. I fully accept that it is possible for others to reach a legitimate judgment on the question that differs from that of the Government, which I commend to the House. However, it would be difficult for someone with the ultimate responsibility for recommending to the House the decision that it should take to put aside the careful judgment of ACPO, reached in such unequivocal terms. I ask hon. Members to take careful note of that judgment and give it proper and full weight when they decide how to vote.

Mr. Marlow: What do the chief constables mean when they say that disassembly cannot be policed? Does it mean that some people might not abide by the law and would therefore break it? If they broke the law on disassembly, they could break it by holding guns that they were not entitled to have. Where does that take us?

Mr. Howard: I do not think that my hon. Friend was present for the whole debate. That point was made earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells and others. As I sought to explain in answer to their interventions, my belief, which is shared by ACPO, is that there are those who will be tempted by the ease of fitting spare parts into another part of a gun who would not necessarily buy illegal guns. That is the judgment on which the amendments turn.

Mr. Frank Cook *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I accept that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells may take a different view on where the balance of judgment lies. I have put before the House the basis on which I have reached mine.

Before I conclude, I want to reply to the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), who asked a specific question about police training, which was dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State in another place. She said quite unequivocally that both the Ministry of Defence and ACPO agreed with the Government's assessment that training for the requisite standards of proficiency would continue to be provided for police and the personnel of the armed services when they are on duty. That is what happens.

Mr. Cook: It is insufficient.

Mr. Howard: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's view that it is insufficient, nor did ACPO.

I have attempted to identify the judgment which lies at the heart of the decision that the House must take on the amendment. I invite hon. Members to pay particular attention to the judgment of ACPO, that disassembly is incapable of being policed. I invite hon. Members to disagree with the two amendments that were passed in another place.

Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 394, Noes 115.

Division No. 78] [6.14 pm

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashton, Joseph
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin–Walker, John
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Bradley, Keith
Brandreth, Gyles
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Cartiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Roch'd)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clelland, David
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Congdon, David
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Couchman, James
Cousins, Jim

Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dixon, Rt Hon Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Faulds, Andrew
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Fraser, John
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Gunnell, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hain, Peter
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hardy, Peter
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Henderson, Doug
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Home Robertson, John
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacKay, Andrew
McKelvey, William
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Madel, Sir David
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pearson, Ian
Pickles, Eric
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowe, Andrew
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Salmond, Alex
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Alan
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Speed, Sir Keith
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Streeter, Gary
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bex'lyh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Trotter, Neville
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Ward, John
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watson, Mike
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John

Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and Mr. Matthew Carrington.

NOES

Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Harry
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bendall, Vivian
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Cash, William
Churchill, Mr
Colvin, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Dalyell, Tam
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gapes, Mike
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hoey, Kate
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Marlow and Mr. Den Dover.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment accordingly disagreed to.

It being after fifteen minutes past Six o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Question to be decided at that hour, pursuant to the Order this day.*

Lords amendment No. 12 disagreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 25, after clause 11, to insert the following new clause—*Compensation scheme for firearms dealers—*

".—(1) The Secretary of State shall, in accordance with a scheme made by him, make payments to persons who on 16th October 1996 were wholly or mainly carrying on business as registered firearms dealers under the 1968 Act, in respect of any loss of business directly caused by the prohibition contained in section 1.

(2) A scheme under subsection (1) above shall provide for payments to be equivalent to one year of after-tax profits of the business, based on the average after-tax profits from the audited financial statements of the business for the three financial years, or for the total period of trading if less than three years, before the passing of this Act as calculated by a qualified person.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (2) above—

"business" means only the business or that part of the business directly affected by the prohibition contained in section 1; and

"qualified person" means a person eligible for appointment as a company auditor in accordance with section 25 of the Companies Act 1989.

(4) A scheme under subsection (1) above may—

(a) restrict eligibility for receipt of payments to claims made within a period specified in the scheme;

(b) provide for the procedure to be followed (including any time within which claims must be made and the provision of information) in respect of claims under the scheme and for the determination of such claims."

6.30 pm

Mr. Howard: I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendment No. 26, Lords amendments Nos. 27 and 93 and the Government motions to disagree thereto, and Government amendment (a).

I have to inform the House that all four of these Lords amendments involve questions of privilege.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Will it be possible to have separate votes on Lords amendment Nos. 25 and 27?

Madam Deputy Speaker: If it is so desired, yes.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On the last vote, the majority of Conservative Members of Parliament who are not on the payroll either opposed the measure or did not support it. The fact is that only a minority of the Conservative party supported the Government. That fact should be known because the matter now returns to another place, whose Members might like to know that the Conservative party supports what they did last time and would seek to support them if they continue.

Madam Deputy Speaker: One must not use points of order to make points of policy or opinion.

Mr. Howard: The Government are committed to paying compensation at a fair market value to people who

[Mr. Howard]

hold firearms certificates for the higher-calibre handguns that the Bill will prohibit. These values would be those that applied immediately prior to my announcement in the House on 16 October last year.

I should like to remind the House of the arrangements that are planned. To qualify for compensation an owner will have to have held his firearm on a firearms certificate; or have held it by virtue of being a registered firearms dealer; or have been contracted to acquire his or her gun on 16 October; and will have to surrender it to the police. Owners will be able to choose between three compensation options.

First, there will be a basic flat-rate figure that an owner may claim for each high-calibre handgun he surrenders, whatever its make, age or condition. Secondly, there will be a list of market values—as applied immediately before 16 October 1996—for the most commonly held types of handgun. Those figures may be higher than the basic compensation figure and owners who hand in a gun of one of these types will be able to claim that value.

Thirdly, there will be owners whose guns do not fit within these arrangements or who want to obtain their own valuation. We intend that those who wish to will be able to submit valuations that they themselves have obtained. In cases of dispute there will be recourse to a second independent valuation of the gun.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Who exactly will do all that valuation? Item 12 of the letter that was circulated today by the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), states:

"Any discrepancies in the claim—including any relating to the condition of items claimed for under Option C—will either need to be resolved before the claim is accepted by the police."

For some reason, that paragraph does not make complete sense, but the issue with which it deals is important. Can the Home Secretary explain the background to that provision?

Mr. Howard: Any arguments about the condition of the gun could be dealt with at the time the gun is surrendered to the police, but questions of valuation will not, of course, be decided by the police. They will be decided in the way that is properly set out in the letter and the accompanying document.

Owners will also be entitled to compensation on a similar market-value basis for ammunition, including expanding ammunition which the Bill would prevent them from owning and for accessories and other ancillary equipment which they own and which has no use other than in connection with prohibited higher-calibre handguns.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Within that list of accessories will there be included a machine for reloading ammunition, which a small business might have so that it could sell reloaded ammunition to others? Does that fall within my right hon. and learned Friend's category?

Mr. Howard: It is highly likely to do so. I answer in that rather provisional way because the details are not yet fixed. We intend to discuss with the British Shooting Sports Council the question of precisely what these accessories will be and what their values will be. Examples that we have in mind include reloading equipment for cartridges, specialised holsters and spare parts.

There will also be ex gratia payments—separate from the compensation scheme—for shooters who own .22 rim-fire and other small-calibre handguns, which will not become prohibited by the Bill but which the Bill will require to be kept in licensed pistol clubs. Owners who cannot find a club in which to keep their pistol or who choose not to join a club will be able to apply for an ex gratia payment for their gun; but this will, as I said, be separate from the statutory compensation scheme.

Taking account of the concerns raised earlier in the passage of the Bill about the nature of the compensation scheme, we have decided that the scheme should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. Amendment No. 26 will enable parliamentary oversight of the scheme. I intend to lay the scheme in draft form before this House and another place. The scheme could not be made effective until approved by a resolution of this House and by a resolution in another place.

Mr. Dalyell: If the Home Secretary was the owner of, for example, a Ruger Blackhawk 6in barrel, which I am told is quite a valuable gun, would he be content to accept 175 quid as compensation? Knowing him as I do, I bet he would not.

Mr. Howard: I am sorry to say that I can offer no opinion on that question, as I do not own any such gun. However, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, if any person who does own such a gun is not content with the amount identified in the list attached to the document, it would be open to him to come along with his own valuation and establish that the weapon is worth more than £175. If he makes his case and the valuation is a proper one, he would be compensated on that basis.

The provision that the scheme should be approved by the House would not alter the principles of the compensation arrangements that I have just set out. Both in this House and in another place very full consideration has been given to this issue and we have explained why the Government have decided that compensation should be paid for weapons, ammunition and other ancillary equipment. The amendment means that the details of the scheme can be fully considered by Parliament before it comes into effect.

I would now like to say a few words about amendment No. 25, which concerns compensation for business losses by firearms dealers as a result of the Bill.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): My right hon. and learned Friend has made it clear that the valuation is to be set at the date on which he made his announcement to the House and not before the tragedy at Dunblane. He must be aware that, terrible though that event was, it is the purchase blight placed on the value of firearms by the legislation that has affected what he now deems to be the market value. That will undoubtedly be an issue disputed in any appeal.

Mr. Howard: Indeed, it is because the purchase blight consequent on the legislation is important that I have said that the valuation should be as at the day before any

announcement was made about the nature of the legislation. That is precisely the point and it is a precise response to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): It seems to me that purchase blight has already hit the list of valuations that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State handed us all at the beginning of the debate. The Home Secretary may not be the owner of a heavy-calibre pistol but indirectly, through the Palace of Westminster shooting club, hon. Members are the owners of two .38 calibre Smith and Wesson 14 6in barrel revolvers. They are listed in the document as being worth £225 each, but *Target Gun* magazine—which is currently regarded as one of the most reliable indicators of market value—puts the value of the pistols at £386. It seems that blight has hit the Home Office list, but not the market generally.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend makes an extremely interesting point, and I defer to him with his considerable expertise and knowledge of these issues. I would simply emphasise that the document that we have circulated, including the list of values to which my hon. Friend referred, has been circulated for consultation, so we shall be very interested to listen to arguments, such as that made by my hon. Friend, before we finalise even that list. Then, notwithstanding the definitive list, it will be possible for any individual shooter to say, "My weapon is worth more than the list says; would you please compensate me on that basis?" That would be a perfectly reasonable way to proceed.

Sir Patrick Cormack: That is fine as far as it goes, but what proof of value will my right hon. and learned Friend require? Will he give the House an unequivocal assurance that a receipt or normal valuation by a qualified valuer, saying that the gun in question is worth £386, would be acceptable as proof?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend knows that valuation is not a very precise art. If someone wanted to argue that his gun was worth more than the value identified in the list when the list was in its definitive form, we would expect him to produce evidence from an expert in these matters, who would say, "I know about these things: I know the state of the market and I know about this type of gun, and it is my considered opinion that this particular weapon is worth more than the amount identified in the list." We shall expect that type of approach.

Sir Patrick Cormack: What about the receipt?

Mr. Howard: The receipt would show what was paid for the gun. That would be one of the factors to be taken into account, but obviously, as my hon. Friend will appreciate, only one.

Amendment No. 25 concerns compensation for business losses by firearms dealers as a result of the Bill. The Government recognise the strength of feeling in both Houses on that issue, but we cannot accept liability for business losses that might result from the introduction of legislation aimed at improving public safety. As far as I am aware, that would be unprecedented, and it would limit considerably the scope for future improvements, not just in firearms legislation but across the board.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Lady forgive me for a moment?

In other areas, such as transport, medicines, chemicals and pollution, the Government have not paid compensation for business losses that may have been incurred as a result of legislative changes. Where the effect of Government legislation is to deprive people of property or of the use of that property, it is broadly the case that the taxpayer provides some recompense for those people in relation to the value of the property. That principle has been a recognised part of English law for many years. It underpins our obligations under the European convention on human rights and is the principle that informed our compensation scheme.

The Government will pay compensation to firearms dealers on the same basis as home owners in respect of prohibited handguns and ancillary equipment that they owned or were contracted to acquire on or before 16 October 1996. However, our obligations do not extend to include compensation for business losses and other liabilities.

All businesses operate within a framework of legislation. In the case of the gun industry, the framework is stricter and more specific than that in many other industries. It regulates what types of guns and ammunition can be bought and sold and who may buy and sell them. It is right that there should be a strong framework to control the market in a product which is, potentially, extremely dangerous. Moreover, that framework of regulation has existed since the 1920s and everyone who works in the firearms industry operates within it.

Miss Hoey: Is the Home Secretary aware that, on a recent visit, one of the Australian Ministers—who is a Member of Parliament for Tasmania, where there was an appalling gun incident, as the Home Secretary knows—said that gun legislation received general support from all people in Australia only because compensation was treated seriously and everyone was compensated? If citizens generally, through our Government, are taking away people's rights, surely the least that the Government can do is to ensure that those people are compensated.

Mr. Howard: Grateful though I am to the hon. Lady for patiently waiting to intervene, I do not accept the point that she makes, for the precise reasons that I am giving. As far as I am aware, it would be wholly unprecedented to award such compensation. It would establish an undesirable principle; I do not believe that we should establish that principle.

6.45 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton *rose—*

Sir Patrick Cormack *rose—*

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton).

Mr. Winterton: My right hon. and learned Friend knows that I have in my constituency one of the most successful, and one of the largest, wholesalers of arms and ammunition. Does he expect me to vote for a Government who are very likely to put that company, which has been in existence for more than 50 years and provides about 30 jobs in my constituency, out of business, and thereby make a large number of people—a majority of them women—unemployed?

Is what my right hon. and learned Friend is proposing real justice? I fully support the view just expressed by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey). If we are to deny people the right to continue a business that has operated legitimately for more than 50 years, we should fully and properly compensate them.

Mr. Howard: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I very much sympathise with his constituent and I hope that the dire consequences that my hon. Friend predicted will not come to pass.

Mr. Winterton *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Howard: I know that my hon. Friend will consider the wider implications of what he proposes; I have tried to address those wider implications. I have more to say about those wider implications; I do not believe that they can be lightly set aside or ignored.

Sir Patrick Cormack *rose—*

Sir Donald Thompson *rose—*

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) has been waiting, and I have given way to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) more than once.

Sir Donald Thompson: The helpful document on compensation from the Minister of State says:

"The Government has also agreed to make payments . . . This agreement does not extend"

to small-calibre pistols held in stock by dealers nor does it extend

"to ancillary equipment relating to them as there will continue to be a demand for such equipment."

My right hon. and learned Friend took as examples transport and catering. In those industries, legislation is usually evolutionary, and a catering firm introduces new bits of kit and equipment to keep up with the times and with modern knowledge. However, the proposals before us are draconian. A man in my constituency makes nothing but ammunition for handguns. He employs five people. We shall put him out of business.

Mr. Howard: I am not sure that I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is true that in some industries and in some cases, legislative change of the type that we are discussing is what my hon. Friend has described as "evolutionary", but there are many examples where that is not the case and where the result of a specific piece of legislation is very serious for the firm concerned. Obviously, one does not like that to happen and one greatly sympathises with those whose jobs may be at risk, but it has not been the case that, when we have dealt with such matters in the past, we have provided compensation for that type of consequence.

Mr. Winterton: This is exceptional.

Sir Patrick Cormack: This situation is virtually unprecedented. I should like my right hon. and learned Friend to give one example of a sector of legitimate business and industry totally destroyed by legislation without compensation, and without the opportunity for those employed in the industry to do something similar. That opportunity has gone. This is a unique situation, and I doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend can find precedent. Moreover, this would not establish precedent.

Mr. Howard: I am not sure that I agree with my hon. Friend. One may test matters to some extent by considering the history of the firearms industry. As I said on Report, major changes have been made in the regulatory environment that applies to this industry several times in recent history, and those changes have had a massive impact on the shooting industry and on those who use guns for leisure purposes. In 1920, firearms controls were introduced for the first time. In 1934, fully automatic weapons were prohibited. In 1962, airguns and shotguns were made subject to restriction for the first time. In 1988, semi-automatic and self-loading rifles were prohibited. In 1992, disguised firearms were prohibited.

Many other minor changes have affected the operations of gun dealers and gun clubs apart from the major changes that I have just identified. All those changes were introduced to improve public safety, and some will undoubtedly have affected some businesses more than others; but none was made the subject of compensation for business. No one who works in the firearms industry can be unaware of the significance of regulatory controls on that industry.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend really trying to tell the House that if at some future date a Government introduced a Bill to prohibit drink on the ground that it was bad for people's health, every brewery, off-licence and pub would have to shut? All those people would go bankrupt; would the Government say, "Because this is for the benefit of health, there will be no compensation"? Surely my right hon. and learned Friend cannot envisage such circumstances.

Mr. Howard: I take some comfort from the fact that, were any Government to introduce such an outlandish measure, my hon. Friend and I would be in the same Lobby opposing it resolutely—but I have every confidence that no such proposal would ever reach the statute book.

Mr. Batiste: My right hon. and learned Friend has drawn a distinction between loss of business and loss of property. He is clearly not talking about compensation for

a business's loss of profits, but what about plant and equipment, which can often be quite valuable and which has no other use?

Mr. Howard: I do not think so, for reasons that I have already given.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is not a legitimate firearms dealer entitled to say, "I understand that an appalling tragedy took place and that a careful inquiry was conducted under a distinguished judge, having been set up by the Government, but I did not and could not anticipate that the Government would decide—when Parliament was not sitting—to go against the recommendations of that inquiry, and that is why we are experiencing difficulties now"?

Mr. Howard: With great respect to my hon. Friend, it is not easy to resolve the question whether the Government have gone further than Lord Cullen's recommendations. I pointed that out when we were discussing the last group of amendments. We certainly went further than Lord Cullen recommended in that he recommended that people should be allowed to keep single-shot pistols at home. He put forward that suggestion for consideration: he did not really regard it as a recommendation. We have said that no single-shot pistol should be kept at home—that no pistols of any kind should be kept at home.

Lord Cullen expressed a preference for disassembly of multi-shot pistols—we have just dealt with that—but said that if, for one reason or another, disassembly was not regarded as a viable solution, all private ownership of handguns should end, and that only handguns kept in and owned by clubs should be available for shooting purposes. I do not think that it can be argued that we have gone further than Lord Cullen in that respect, and I do not think that the question is as easy to resolve as is sometimes made out.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I think that the House understands my right hon. and learned Friend's reluctance to establish a precedent by compensating people who have undoubtedly lost out as a result of the change in the law, but does this not send the country a terrible message? Are not law-abiding people being told, "You are entitled to run your businesses, but if we, Parliament, change the law at the drop of a hat, you will not be compensated, although you have been bona fide all your lives and your businesses are bona fide"? At the same time, as all hon. Members know, there are thousands of illegally held firearms that are not affected by the legislation, and to which the question of compensation simply does not apply. That, as I am sure my right hon. and learned Friend will recognise, is very rough justice.

Mr. Howard: With great respect, I do not see how questions of compensation could apply to illegal firearms. We have a problem with such firearms, as I constantly acknowledge, and the police are doing their best to deal with it; but I do not think that the fact that we have not yet been able to eliminate illegal firearms relieves us of the responsibility to deal with the problem that arises when dreadful acts such as the one committed at Dunblane are committed with legally held firearms. That takes us back to debates in which we have engaged more than once during the Bill's passage.

Mr. Colvin: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Howard: I will, but then I must deal with Lords amendment No. 27.

Mr. Colvin: Will my right hon. and learned Friend clarify a question relating to property? It applies both to the businesses that we have just been discussing and to the clubs with which my right hon. and learned Friend is about to deal.

We are not discussing big business. Dealers are small businesses, and we as a party are supposed to help small businesses. Clubs usually operate on very thin ice financially: they are generally mortgaged, and the ownership of the property—in the case of both clubs and businesses—is very tenuous. Destroying the business of dealers and the membership of clubs will put the ownership of property in jeopardy.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend clarify what Lady Blatch said in the debate on these amendments in the other place? She said:

"We"—

the Government, that is—

"accept that where the effect of government legislation is to deprive people of property or of the use of that property, then it is right that taxpayers collectively should pay those property owners for the value of that property. This principle has been a part of English law for many years. It also arises from our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, and is the principle which informs our compensation scheme."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 February 1997; Vol. 577, c. 1592.]

Will that apply to both clubs and dealers in this instance?

Mr. Howard: It will apply—I used similar words a few moments ago—but I do not think that it will apply in quite the way that my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Colvin: I thought that my right hon. and learned Friend would say that.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right in that respect. I think that he is well aware of the distinction that lies at the heart of my answer.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I have listened to my right hon. and learned Friend with great interest, but I cannot quite follow the logic of the desire of the police and of the Home Office to get rid of illegal weapons. Surely, if compensation is to be paid to those who hand in such weapons, we stand a good chance of getting rid of rather a lot of them: it is nonsensical to deny that. Why not do it in that way?

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that I am not attracted by my right hon. Friend's suggestion that wrongdoers should be rewarded with compensation. We had a successful amnesty last year, when a good many weapons were handed in, but I have no intention of compensating wrongdoers in the way that my right hon. Friend suggests.

[Mr. Howard]

Amendment No. 27 deals with clubs or associations that suffer losses as a result of the Bill. Some existing target shooting clubs that cater predominantly for pistol shooting may not be able to adapt to the new licensed arrangements; others which concentrate on providing rifle target or shotgun shooting, or adapt to these disciplines, will be little affected. Clubs will be eligible for compensation for prohibited handguns and accessories under the terms of the Government's compensation scheme, but we do not intend to compensate them for any other losses. The Government have not been, and cannot be, liable for business that may be lost by companies, clubs or associations when they introduce regulation in the interests of public safety.

The protection of the public is one of the overriding duties of Government. It would be a significant inhibiting factor if, on occasions when the Government are obliged to legislate in the interests of public safety, they were also obliged to pay for business losses that might result from that legislation. As I have said, we intend to pay fair compensation to dealers for lost stock, but in declining to compensate for business loss as well the Government must have regard to problems that that would create for any future legislation on matters of public safety.

Much as we regret the difficulties that many clubs and businesses may face, I believe that this is the right course for the Government to take.

7 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I start from the simple proposition that the House should not pass legislation that offends the sense of justice and fair play of the ordinary British citizen. In my judgment, the response of the Home Secretary tonight shrieks of injustice. If the argument were put to ordinary British citizens, they would agree that it is wholly unfair and unjust.

In the Second Reading debate on 12 February I set out the example of a small family-run firm in my constituency—Shooters of Swansea. The family who own the business have no other assets. They have used their private homes as security. They have carried on the business with the support and encouragement of the local authority and always fully in accord with the local police. As day follows night, that pistol shooting business will be ruined and the owners will have no compensation.

Mr. John Carlisle: I notice that the hon. Gentleman said that the club was run with the support of the local authority. Is he aware that many local authorities, mainly Labour-controlled, are actively discouraging gun clubs by making life distinctly uncomfortable for them? Will he persuade his Front-Bench colleagues, perhaps in relation to another Department, that Labour councils should be discouraged from doing that?

Mr. Anderson: I do not know what other local authorities may or may not do. I know that Swansea city council has given full planning and financial encouragement to that family business, and that it will be ruined.

Following legal advice from a leading silk, I set out various principles of law in the Second Reading debate, relying in particular on the case of Lithgow and the principle of the "fair balance," and the fact that in that case it was expressly said that whether that balance was fair depended in large part on the compensation offered to those who suffered.

In Committee in the House of Lords, it was said by the Earl of Lytton, who moved the relevant amendment, that no answer had been given to the legal points that I raised, based on the advice of a very senior practitioner in that field.

No answer was given then, and no substantial answer has been given today. I shall not detain the House with the arguments that were set out by Lord Lester in the other place. I will merely say that Lord Lester is a man of enormous experience in the field of human rights legislation. He set out the reasons why, in his judgment, there were indeed precedents—for instance, in Australia—of similar common law legislation where in the exceptional conditions of the gun legislation the Australian legislature, recognising that it must respond to the people's sense of fairness, compensated for business losses. A number of other examples were given—in planning law, for example, and in the rendering industry in connection with BSE.

Such examples and precedents could be cited, if the Government were so minded. The Government, however, are concerned not with fairness but with the effect on the Treasury. I understand that those advising the Home Office are fairly confident that if the matter went to the European Court of Justice or the European Court of Human Rights, the Government would be likely to lose. The problem is, of course, time. If the matter were litigated in the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg, it would take fully two years, and if it were litigated in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, it would probably take five years, unless and until that convention is incorporated into our domestic law.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent) *rose—*

Mr. Anderson: I must be brief. If the Home Office is simply seeking to buy time, how moral is that? That is the morality of the insurance company that plays for time in the hope that the terminally ill patient will die. It is clear that many businesses will be ruined by the time the matter is litigated and the Home Office probably loses. That is thoroughly unfair and unjust. It will offend the sense of justice on which the House should rest its legislation.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I am as depressed with our Front Bench tonight as I was in 1988 when we debated the Firearms (Amendment) Bill. In that case, too, the Government rushed into legislation and found it singularly unsatisfactory when it reached the House.

If only we had had a debate on Cullen in the House after the publication of the report and before policy legislation was decided on, we would have removed many of the anomalies facing us today.

In another place 115 amendments were tabled. I appreciate that some of those are meeting points proposed by their Lordships and from this House, but it is clear that additional drafting was required and many changes in the legislation, all of which could have been dealt with more satisfactorily if we had not hurried forward so quickly.

The Front Bench has not addressed the matter of timing. Presumably the Bill will be enacted shortly. What will be the timing of events thereafter? Will the Home Secretary, and his counterparts for Scotland and Wales, order the police to close down all gun and rifle clubs until they meet the security regulations? When will all the pistols have to be handed in? The average police station will hardly welcome thousands of pistols, which will require valuation and many of which will be the subject of argument as to whether they are antiques or heirlooms, whether they are flintlocks or percussion capped, and so on.

That must all be sorted out. Yet no guidance has been given. Nothing causes greater annoyance than uncertainty. The Home Secretary has created a huge amount of uncertainty about the proceedings once the Bill becomes an Act.

As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and I have pointed out many times, if mountains of weapons are deposited in police stations all over the country, how will the valuations be carried out? An enormous amount of police time will be spent waiting for the relatively few qualified valuers of firearms to come and look at many individual weapons all over the country. The cost will be substantial.

Mr. Rowe: I have no way yet of assessing whether what I have been told is true, but a respectable constituent of mine alleges that some of the people who were due for compensation after the Hungerford change in the law have still not received the money that was due to them.

Sir Hector Monro: I have seen that in print during the past month or two.

The Home Secretary must tell us today about the position of the gun and rifle clubs and their buildings and ranges. In those ranges, highly qualified people carry out their international shooting practice. We have a tremendous reputation throughout the world for marksmanship. I speak as a past president of the National Small-Bore Rifle Association, and I know how important the ranges are. Are they to be shut down forthwith, until they fulfil the terms of the security regulations? What are the regulations to be? What will be the difference between regulations applying to indoor ranges and those applying to open ranges?

The Home Secretary must deal with all that. He has given us little information about the valuation of weapons. I appreciate that the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), has produced a document for us giving approximate prices, but they seem to vary only between £150 and £450. We all know that high-precision weapons will be considerably more valuable than that. It is relatively easy to value a shotgun, but it is far more complicated for precision weapons of the quality that we are talking about, which are used for international-standard shooting in this country. Who will carry out the valuations? Will they be carried out by the police? Will they be carried out sympathetically and helpfully? Will everybody be given time to discuss whether their weapon is a military heirloom, an antique or a museum piece? None of that is clear.

People want to know what will happen to their valuable possessions. It is bad enough having them confiscated, but it is even worse if one has kept a much-loved weapon very secure for many years only to have it whipped away at the drop of a hat. We pointed out time and again that we are not doing anything to help make people in this country safer. Of course I accept the tragedy of Dunblane and understand the horrors that those people had to face, but what we are doing is not the answer. In Australia, a high-powered, multi-shot weapon was used, but such weapons are illegal here anyhow. In New Zealand, a shotgun was used. Shotguns are legal here, but we do not deal with that in the Bill. That shows that we are not being consistent, and we cannot say that what we are doing tonight will make this country safer, when the place is awash with illegal weapons.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will explain the procedures for all the people who will have their weapons taken away from them.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): The right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) raised the issue of consistency. It is my belief that the application of consistent principles requires that the House supports the amendments that the Government have proposed today.

We accept, and always have—I do not think that there has ever been any argument across the Chamber about this, save on one occasion in 1988—that where individuals or businesses lose their property or property rights as a result of legislation or decisions made under legislation, for example, as a result of putting a road through a particular route, it is entirely proper that they should be compensated for that loss. That has been a consistent principle. It is also right that where people lose their business as a result of a motorway going through it, they should be compensated for that total loss of business.

Before we come to the issue raised by Lords amendment No. 25, it is worth bearing it in mind that—as many of my hon. Friends and I can testify—the motorway compensation principles do not work out all that equitably in practice. I have constituents whose houses are in the line of the M65 motorway link between the M6 and Whitebirk, to the east of Blackburn. Their houses are not directly on the line but are on the edge of the motorway. The Department of Transport has accepted that their property values have declined by more than 15 per cent.—a trigger point for compensation, but because according to the Department the noise levels have not increased sufficiently, those people cannot claim compensation. There are many similar examples.

I believe that those people should receive compensation, because their property rights have been directly and adversely affected. Their right to compensation must come way above the claim of those who lose a business as a result of legislation.

Mr. Gale: The Home Office has made it abundantly plain that it expects that small gun clubs will close because they will not be able to meet the security regulations, and as a result larger gun clubs will be set up. Those small clubs have members who have invested. They are not businesses. They are members' clubs. The members own them and have invested in the facilities. If the Bill goes through tonight, as planned, there will be no compensation for those people whatever. What does the hon. Gentleman think about that?

7.15 pm

Mr. Straw: I understand that, and although sympathy may come free, I have every sympathy with people in that predicament. I do not, however, believe that on any careful examination such clubs or businesses are in a different position from businesses that were affected by other legislation. I ask Conservative Members in particular, who have always—very honourably—been concerned about the impact of legislation on the public purse, to think about the consequences of agreeing this precedent today, for precedent it is bound to be.

That is one example, but it is no different from the very adverse effect that legislation had on many businesses that made foam-filled furniture. They did so lawfully and honourably, but, following a change in the law they lost their businesses. The cattle deboning industry was wiped out and received no compensation whatever. Many pharmaceutical companies put drugs on to the market which are lawfully licensed, then some problem arises and they have to take them off. They may lose millions of pounds, as may their shareholders, but they receive no compensation at all.

Sir Terence Higgins: Will the hon. Gentleman take into account the point made by his hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) about the European convention on human rights? When voting on the amendment today, will he consider the implications of the convention, particularly if it should be incorporated? More important, the shadow Chancellor said very clearly that he would not do anything in excess of the Government's expenditure plans. It is quite clear that if compensation is to be paid—even in the restricted terms proposed by the Home Secretary—the policy that the hon. Gentleman advocates, that of a total ban on all handguns, is bound to be vastly in excess of what the Government propose to incur. What is his position on that?

Mr. Straw: The compensation that would arise from a complete ban would not be vastly in excess—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It would not. It would be 20 per cent. more than the total, because the .22 ban affects only 20 per cent. of the total.

The right hon. Gentleman's first point is very important. We thought very carefully about the European convention on human rights, and I am pleased that it is now being prayed in aid on both sides of the House. I look forward in the next Parliament to widespread support for its incorporation. After all, it was drafted in part by a distinguished former Conservative Lord Chancellor, Lord Kilmuir.

If one reads carefully the speech of Lord Lester of Herne Hill, who is unquestionably a great expert on the European convention on human rights, one will see that he picked his words with great care. At no stage did he say that in his opinion the compensation scheme proposed by the Government would run foul of the European convention. The most that he said was that it raised powerful arguments about breaches, and we know that when a lawyer says that something raises powerful arguments he is accepting that the case is not all that strong.

Lord Lester quoted the words of the European Court of Human Rights, which said that it has to be decided whether a fair balance has been struck between the demands of the general interest of the community and the requirement to protect an individual's fundamental freedom. That is a fair way of putting the issue before the House. Of course there is an issue of an individual's fundamental freedoms. I wish that, in a perfect world, we could compensate everybody and also protect public safety, but we do not live in a perfect world. We have to make choices. I think that the Government's amendment properly reflects a balance.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Perhaps the caution of Lord Lester is as much as one could expect from such a distinguished lawyer, but it is surely not difficult to distinguish cases such as the factory producing foam-filled mattresses, which my hon. Friend cited, from that of a shooting club, because a factory producing foam-filled mattresses can adapt the premises to produce other forms of mattress. By their nature, purpose-built premises such as those in my constituency cannot adapt and would be totally ruined.

Mr. Straw: That wholly depends on the particular case. There will be some clubs or gun dealers who will be able to adapt their trade to take account—*[Interruption.]* Part of the gun trade would be rendered illegal. Part of it was rendered unlawful in 1988, but a large part of the gun trade—rifles and shotguns are still lawfully licensed—remains wholly lawful, and that may include country sports.

I wish to pick up a point that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) made from a sedentary position about other areas in which businesses are affected by legislation. He has represented his constituents with great skill in respect of the textile trade in his constituency, as I have sought to do over the past 18 years in respect of my constituents. The textile industry is a shadow of its former self, not least as a result of Government decisions in accepting, for good reasons or ill, various changes in the multi-fibre arrangement. That arrangement—an international treaty—has led to the closure of whole swathes of the industry; yet not a penny of compensation could be or has been paid to those industries. That is why I say to hon. Members on both sides of the House that, whatever merit they may give the argument, a huge precedent would be created if we were to accept the amendment.

Mr. John Townend *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I will not give way. I am about to finish because others wish to speak.

The effect of the precedent would be such that, when next we felt that there was a need to improve public safety through legislation, whether in respect of furniture, the pharmaceutical industry, the transport industry or firearms control, Governments and the House would always be constrained and often prevented from making decisions in favour of public safety by the enormous cost involved. Yes, as the European Court of Human Rights said, there is a balance to be struck between individuals' fundamental freedoms and the general interest of the community, but in my judgment and that of my hon. Friends, the balance on this issue must be struck in favour of the general interests of the community as a whole.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: The argument seems to revolve very much around precedent. I am not a lawyer, but I am

advised that the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 offers not only compensation in general but compensation for anticipated profit. The national compensation code deals with local authorities and Governments acquiring land, property or businesses and is being applied to businesses required to relocate or extinguish as a result of the channel tunnel rail link. Compensation is also addressed by the Land Compensation Act 1973, the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Act 1977 and various pieces of highways legislation.

A Government ordinance to change the foam in a furniture factory, a drug failing or there being tighter control on effluent is completely different from ordinating the cessation of a legitimate business. I am deeply uncomfortable at the moral justice of what we are doing. The Australians very well understand the problem and have managed in their way to give full and fair compensation. If they can do it, we can do it. After all, theirs is a precedent and we can reasonably use it.

Lords amendment No. 27 concerning clubs is about not dealers or businesses but a handful of individuals who have perhaps put some of their own money against a mortgage, lease or whatever. The sums of money are infinitesimal. Indeed, we cannot estimate the global sum, but the level is about £1 million or £2 million. That is not a lot for the Government but a great deal for the unfortunate individuals involved. I am very, very ashamed of my Government for not agreeing with the amendments.

Mr. Dalyell: I just want to ask the Home Secretary one factual question. Home Office officials must have been summoned to the Treasury and asked how much, in the next year and the year after, all the Home Office's proposals would cost. What answer did his officials give?

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I rise to speak because I am incensed by what my Government are doing. The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) talked about a sense of justice. My goodness, how the Government with this Bill are legislating against justice in every way. Throughout today's debate, one Member after another, from both sides of the House, has pointed out the injustice, illogicality, nonsense and lunacy of the legislation. Surely nothing brings the House into greater disrepute than what it is doing today: legislating in ignorance against justice in order to achieve a particular objective and not permitting proper and full debate.

I asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary earlier what he expects me to do when 30 to 35 per cent. of the business of a family company that I represent—I believe that it was founded by the current chairman's grandfather—is outlawed almost retrospectively by the Government, probably putting its future viability in doubt, preventing it providing jobs for the next generation and putting a number of my constituents out of work as soon as the legislation hits the statute book.

Why does my right hon. and learned Friend not listen to the sense that is being spoken by Members of all parties? Whatever he may say, the Bill is a knee-jerk reaction to a horrific incident that we all regret. We all sympathise fully with all those who lost children on that occasion. He will come to rue the day that he allowed what I believe is dogma as a result of a particular occasion completely to dominate him—and the sense of justice to which the hon. Member for Swansea, East referred to go out of the window. My right hon. and learned Friend does this House no service, he does his party no service and he will not have my support in the Lobby.

Mr. Howard: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond to some of the points that have been made in the debate.

I of course understand the strong feelings to which the measures have given rise and the indignation of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), but I believe that the Government have come to the right decision on the question of the circumstances in which compensation should be payable. We have to look at these matters with a view to their wider implications, as I sought to explain to my hon. Friend in response to his intervention.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) asked a number of specific questions to which I shall attempt to reply in the time available. He asked about the transitional arrangements for the handing in of guns. Those are at present under discussion between the Government, the Association of Chief Police Officers and ACPO in Scotland. I very much hope that the matter will be able to be dealt with in precisely the spirit that my right hon. Friend suggested that it should be.

We expect to be able to publish the security criteria for clubs as a consultation document with the British Shooting Sports Council, the firearms consultative committee and others—I hope reasonably soon. We hope to bring forward for parliamentary approval a compensation scheme before Easter. The timing of the surrender and compensation arrangements, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries specifically asked me, will depend on securing that approval.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked about the total cost of compensation to be provided under the Bill. That is of course dealt with in the explanatory and financial memorandum, which sets out that the total cost of compensation is estimated to be in the region of £150 million.

Mr. Marlow: I should like to ask my right hon. and learned Friend a short political question. He knows that the election is due by 1 May, that this Bill is bad legislation and that the Conservative party is opposed to it. Why on earth in God's name is he persisting with it?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend knows the answer to that question, because I have given it to him on a number of occasions. He has posed similar questions during our debates on the legislation.

The amendments, with which I invite the House to disagree, would extend the arrangements for compensation beyond any of those that we have had before in comparable circumstances. I do not believe that it would be justifiable to ask the taxpayer to pay for such an extension. We have had to strike a difficult balance between our responsibilities to the taxpayer and our desire to compensate those who will suffer as a consequence of the legislation. I believe that we have struck the right balance, and on that basis I invite the House to disagree with the Lords amendment.

Question put, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 140.

Division No. 79] **[7.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Bayley, Hugh
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butler, Peter
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coe, Sebastian
Cohen, Harry
Congdon, David
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth Kinross)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Donohoe, Brian H
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Faulds, Andrew
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Flynn, Paul
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Gunnell, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hain, Peter
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Killoyle, Peter
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacKay, Andrew
McKelvey, William
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLeish, Henry
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
MacShane, Denis
Madden, Max
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Salmond, Alex
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Alan
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Straw, Jack
Streeter, Gary
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter

Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Tipping, Paddy
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Trotter, Neville
Turner, Dennis
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waterson, Nigel
Watson, Mike
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Matthew Carrington and
Mr. Richard Ottaway.

NOES

Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Cash, William
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Colvin, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dover, Den
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hoey, Kate
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Maitland, Lady Olga
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
O'Hara, Edward
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Pawsey, James
Pearson, Ian
Porter, David
Rathbone, Tim
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Sir Keith
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Welsh, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Rupert Allason and
Mr. Robert Banks.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment accordingly disagreed to.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could it be recorded that in the 140 were the overwhelming number of those—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I am trying to listen to a point of order. Will Members leaving the Chamber do so quietly, please?

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could it be recorded, as it was after the previous debate, that the 140 included the overwhelming number of those who had actually been in the Chamber listening to the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made his point. It is not a point of order for the occupant of the Chair.

It being after half-past Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions to be decided at that hour, pursuant to the Order this day.*

Lords amendment No. 26 agreed to [Special Entry].

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 27, insert the following new Clause—

COMPENSATION FOR CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS

(".—(1) The Secretary of State shall, in accordance with a scheme made by him, make payments to persons who on 16th October 1996 were operating a target shooting club or association which as a result of the provisions of this Act will be unable to continue to operate.

(2) A scheme under subsection (1) above shall provide payments in respect of loss incurred by persons who have responsibility for any debt, mortgage, lease or other liability in connection with the club or association.")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 145.

Division No. 80] **[7.43 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Bayley, Hugh
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Bradley, Keith
Brandreth, Gyles
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butler, Peter
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coe, Sebastian
Cohen, Harry
Congdon, David
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, Rt Hon David
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Donohoe, Brian H
Douglas-Hamilton, Rt Hon Lord James
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Eagle, Ms Angela
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Faulds, Andrew
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Flynn, Paul
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Rt Hon Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Garnier, Edward
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Gunnell, John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hain, Peter
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(Grantham)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Ingram, Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
MacKay, Andrew
McKelvey, William
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLeish, Henry
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
MacShane, Denis
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mullin, Chris
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Norris, Steve
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Salmond, Alex
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Alan
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Snape, Peter
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Ms Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Straw, Jack
Streeter, Gary
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Tipping, Paddy
Townsend, Sir Cyril *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George

Waterson, Nigel
Watson, Mike
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and
Mr. Matthew Carrington.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Rt Hon Robert
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Cash, William
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Colvin, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dover, Den
Duncan Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Lynne, Ms Liz
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon Sir James
Monro, Rt Hon Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Pawsey, James
Pearson, Ian
Porter, David
Rathbone, Tim
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Speed, Sir Keith
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'd)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Rupert Allason and
Mr. Robert Banks.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment accordingly disagreed to.

Lords amendment No. 93 disagreed to.

Amendment (a) in lieu of the Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 20

EXEMPTIONS FROM SECTION 1 OF THE 1968 ACT FOR OFFICERS ETC. OF LICENSED PISTOL CLUBS

Lords amendment: No. 40, in page 10, line 16, at end insert—

("(3) A member of a licensed pistol club approved by the Secretary of State may, without holding a firearm certificate, use under the supervision of an officer of the club, for a period not exceeding 60 consecutive days, a small-calibre pistol and ammunition when engaged as a member of the club in, or in connection with, target shooting.")

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I beg to move, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendments (a) to (g) in lieu of the said amendment.

Miss Widdecombe: Amendment No. 40 goes too wide in its effects and would pose a risk to the public. It would allow any club licensed by the Home Secretary to offer a facility to any member to shoot there without holding a firearms certificate. It would not be limited to starter shooters, but would apply to any member who did not hold a firearms certificate, and that might include members whose certificates had been revoked by the police.

The police have expressed concern about the length of time—60 days—that the amendment would allow a person to shoot. It should be possible for a novice to make up his mind whether he wishes to pursue the sport of target pistol shooting in a shorter period than 60 days.

Mr. John Carlisle: Will my right hon. Friend explain why she thinks a new shooter could learn to shoot in 28 days rather than 60? I am sure that she appreciates that a novice will not be able to spend all those 28 days learning to shoot—people have to work or go to school. When their Lordships accepted the amendment, they considered the number of days that it would take a person new to the sport to learn it.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not a question of the starter shooter learning the sport: it is a question of the

[Miss Widdecombe]

starter shooter deciding whether he wishes to pursue the sport and, therefore, whether to apply for a firearms certificate. We do not expect that a starter shooter would become proficient in 28 days, but that is long enough for him to decide whether he likes the sport and wishes to pursue it.

Mr. Frank Cook: Why is it undesirable to extend the number of days from 28 to 60? A person might try shooting once and then have to go away, perhaps even on a parliamentary visit. After 29 days, he would be out of time and have to start all over again. What is so objectionable about the days from the 29th day to the 60th day?

Miss Widdecombe: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that any limit we set will be arbitrary, whether 60, 70, 50, 40, 90, 100 days or whatever. We have to try to find a reasonable limit that will meet the concerns of the police and, at the same time, meet the principle behind the amendment—that there should be a period in which someone can go to a club and decide whether he likes to shoot.

Mr. Cook: But 28 days is not reasonable.

Miss Widdecombe: I have already tried to explain that to the hon. Gentleman. If he does not understand it, I cannot assist him.

We accept the principle behind the amendment, but we cannot accept the detail. Moreover, in the Government's response of 16 October 1996 to Lord Cullen's report, we said that we would make special provisional arrangements for starter shooters. It is unreasonable to expect people interested in the sport to pay the fee and obtain a firearms certificate for a small-calibre pistol before that person has had a chance to try it out. If the sport of target pistol shooting is to continue, licensed pistol clubs should be able to offer facilities to new members who are unsure whether to become full certificate holders.

My noble Friend Lady Blatch gave an undertaking on behalf of the Government that a more appropriate amendment would be introduced at this stage in the Bill's passage. Therefore, the amendments that we have tabled allow the Secretary of State, when he issues a licence to a pistol club, to permit starter shooters to use small-calibre pistols without a firearms certificate at that club for a period of up to 28 days. That does not mean that they will be able to shoot on any 28 separate days but that the last day on which they shoot without a certificate should be no later than 28 days after the first.

Amendments (a) and (b) are technical amendments, which are included in this group for convenience, but they do not relate directly to starter shooters.

8 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin: On a technical point, is my right hon. Friend predicting that there will be a charge for that permission? The chief constable will have to give his permission, and presumably there will be some bureaucracy. Is there any suggestion of a charge being made? What is the initial cost of a firearms certificate, at the end of the 28 days?

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of the firearms certificate at the conclusion of the 28 days will be same as if the person had applied before the 28-day period. The idea is that, when the Secretary of State issues a licence to a club, he can permit starter shooters to use small-calibre pistols.

Amendment (c) allows clubs to have pistols that may be used by starter shooters. Amendment (d) is a consequential amendment and amendment (e) allows the Secretary of State to impose restrictions on the licence. Not all clubs will be granted that facility. The Secretary of State would have to be satisfied that a club had in place sufficient supervisory and other controls to ensure that a starter shooter could safely be allowed to practise.

Amendment (f) sets out the main provisions that I have described, and limits the length of time for the starter shooters' trial period to 28 days. Whether the Secretary of State allows the concession to starter shooters at any particular club will be a matter for him to decide. The amendments also allow him, if he considers it right, to make the concession to some licensed clubs but not to others. In deciding whether to allow starter shooters to shoot without a police certificate at a particular licensed club, he will be able to take account of all the circumstances, including the amount of supervision and training that the club might agree to devote to novice shooters and any concerns that the chief officer of police might have about the operation of the concession at the club in question.

Mr. Henderson: When I was about 27 years old, some of my mates persuaded me to try winter hill walking and ice climbing in Scotland. I spent a great amount of money before I even got out of the car—buying gloves, hats, cagoules, ice axes, crampons and other items—and I remember thinking, "I hope that I enjoy this once I start, because, otherwise, I will have wasted a lot of money." Therefore, I have much sympathy with people who might fancy themselves as target shooters, and I realise that significant costs are involved, especially when starting.

Therefore, it is appropriate to have a trial period in which people can decide whether they think that it is a sport for them, whether they like the environment that it offers and whether they are prepared to invest in the necessary equipment. As I had to make a decision before I even stepped on to the mountain, I think that 28 days is a reasonably generous period to allow someone to decide. If they are motivated, it will intensify their efforts to decide whether they like target shooting. It is a reasonable amount of time, and I support the Government's amendments in lieu of Lords amendment No. 40.

Mr. John Carlisle: My right hon. Friend the Minister will know that we do not intend to divide the House on this measure, although, like the rest of the Bill, it involves a matter of principle. Overturning the Lords' suggestion of allowing 60 days and substituting 28 is somewhat disappointing. I have already explained to her the various possible practical difficulties with people who might not use the full the 28-day period, because they might be sick, at work, require a sudden holiday or have a family bereavement. Therefore, 28 days is not a very long period.

The principle behind providing a period for starter shooters and behind their Lordships' amendment was to encourage young shooters—when possible, in a somewhat alien world. Part of the reaction to the Bill and to the Dunblane tragedy has been for some organisations that work with young people to react, like the Government,

in a knee-jerk fashion, which has caused disappointment. Those organisations, such as the scout movement, for example, are now actively considering banning all forms of target practice among their members. I think that some troops have already banned target practice. There have even been some problems with the Duke of Edinburgh award, which, as hon. Members will know, was the subject of early-day motion 402.

It is incumbent on the House to encourage people, particularly youngsters, to take up the sport, as it is still a legitimate sport—or at least what will be left of it after the passage of this awful Bill is still legitimate. It is somewhat incongruous that, in only the past couple of weeks, we have heard proposals from the Prime Minister to encourage combined cadet forces in schools. In only the past few days, we have heard that the military services, because they are short of personnel, are actively trying to recruit 16-year-olds. However, we are not encouraging—as I think that we should be—youngsters who want to take up the sport of shooting.

Provision of a 28-day period is somewhat mean-minded of the Government, and I agree with the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) that it is difficult to understand why it should not be 60 days instead of 28. In principle, however, we must encourage young people. We have obtained at least something from the Government, but not very much.

Mr. Frank Cook: I can understand that the Minister and the Government cannot accept Lords amendment No. 8. I am also not surprised by their position, because of the attitude that they have expressed on so many other matters. However, I have yet to hear why the amendment is unacceptable. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) has adequately explored the confusion over the Government's position.

I am still astonished, however, that a 60-day period is unacceptable. The Minister has told the House that the Secretary of State has within his gift the ability to allow the concession. He can give the concession, he can withhold it—he can do whatever he likes with it. However, a 60-day period is still not acceptable. I know that the period will be arbitrary, but why have the Government chosen 28 days? We are wasting a lot of time on disagreeing with those in another place who made a good argument and were able to pass an amendment. That is exceedingly wilful.

I am also astonished by the attitude adopted by Opposition Front Benchers. Unless circumstances have changed and I am not aware of the change, the Labour party has made a sworn declaration that it will ban all handguns once it gets into power. Nevertheless, we are talking about approving a 28-day period in which people can decide whether they enjoy taking part in a sport that will eventually be denied to them. So many illogical events are occurring. If the events were taking place in a music hall, I would enjoy them, but, as they are occurring in a legislative Chamber, I am appalled. I do not know where we go from here. I appeal sincerely for hon. Members to think again before engaging in an argument that they apparently do not fully understand.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: It would be churlish not to thank the Government for accepting the principle. Had the amendment not been made, it would have been virtually impossible for anyone wanting to take up shooting to do so without spending a great deal of money—the amount of which we shall no doubt hear later—to get a firearms certificate from scratch and without trying the sport. I sympathise with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), but I have to tell him that .22 shooting is, in my long experience, a great deal more pleasant than ice climbing. I must say that I have never been ice climbing, and the thought of it fills me with horror.

I do not know why we are reducing the total from 60 days to 28 days, but it is symptomatic of the neurotic approach that the Government have to the sport. Anyone with a gun in his hand is, to them, lethal and dangerous, and has to be surrounded by regulations, forms, certificates and security to the point that we are locking ordinary people out of the sport. I am grateful for this opportunity, under pretty stringent conditions, to make that point.

The only thing that worries the shooters is that they take a few weeks to get to know anyone whom they will admit to a club. Normally, clubs have a probationary membership period of at least three months, and sometimes six months, before they will accept anyone, for reasons that we well understand. Limiting this to 28 days will make that personal contact rather difficult. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will take that point and, if in the future the regulations are altered, one of the weaknesses will be the short time available for regulars to get to know a newcomer.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I seek some guidance from the Minister in relation to amendment (g), which refers to clause 23 and the preceding clause 22. If clause 23 is amended in the way that the Minister seeks, would it prevent a recurrence of a tragic event that happened in my constituency a few days ago? That case illustrates the need for the police to have the strongest powers concerning licensed club members who are under criminal investigation.

I have raised this case with the Secretary of State for Scotland and have urged upon him the need for an early fatal accident inquiry into this case, in which a member of the Greenock gun club was charged in Greenock sheriff court with using lewd and libidinous practices in relation to four young boys. He was released from court and, literally hours later—despite the fact that the police had removed his personal weapons from his home and from the club—was able to enter the club, open a weapons locker and use one of the weapons contained therein to commit suicide. The police acted properly and efficiently in confiscating his weapons.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Time is short, and it is just conceivable that the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) is speaking to a different amendment from the one we are discussing. We should like to hear the Minister's response. I think the hon. Gentleman mentioned Lords amendment No. 2, which we are not discussing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is quite right. The hon. Gentleman is going rather wide of the amendment, and he may be referring to Lords amendment No. 2.

Dr. Godman: I am referring to amendment (g), which deals with clause 23 and is concerned with the power

[Dr. Godman]

of entry and inspection of clubs. I appreciate that time is of the essence, but I am seeking to impress upon the Minister that when members of gun clubs are being investigated by the police, not only should they have their weapons removed—as happened in Greenock—but, in terms of the operation and management of these clubs as provided for by clause 23, they should be refused access to the premises. That is why I am seeking an assurance from the Minister along these lines, because this tragedy could have been avoided. It points the way to similar tragedies taking place if, by way of the management of these clubs, such a person is still allowed access.

Miss Widdecombe: In the one minute that remains, I shall try to address the specific points that have been raised. First, I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) that the cost of granting a firearms certificate will be £56, and for a pistol club licence £150. There will be no extra charge for clubs which allow starter shooters. I hope that that is helpful to him.

As to the point raised by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) concerning the tragedy in his constituency—I well understand his concern—it is very difficult to see how somebody being investigated by the police could be automatically banned from entering a club if he was not already in possession of a certificate.

It being fifteen minutes past Eight o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to the Order this day.*

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (g) in lieu of Lords amendment No. 40 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 1 to 7, Nos. 9 to 11, Nos. 13 and 14, No. 15 and Government amendment (a) thereto and consequential Government amendment (a), and Nos. 16 to 24, agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 28 to 33, No. 34 and Government amendment (a) thereto, and Nos. 35 to 39 agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 41 to 49, No. 50 and consequential Government amendment (a), and Nos. 51 to 70 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 71, after clause 32, to insert the following new clause—*Register of holders of shot gun and firearm certificates*—

".—(1) There shall be established a central register of all persons who have applied for a firearm or shot gun certificate or to whom a firearm or shot gun certificate has been granted or whose certificate has been renewed.

(2) The register shall—

(a) record a suitable identifying number for each person to whom a certificate is issued; and

(b) be kept by means of a computer which provides access on-line to all police forces."

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Sir Jerry Wiggin: Perhaps I shall not be out of order if I refer briefly to the comments of the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman). I am sorry for interrupting him in the last few seconds of the previous debate.

I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. The shooting fraternity will have taken notice of the incident that he has mentioned, and will want to take security measures to prevent such an event in future. I strongly suspect that, when the Home Office comes forward with stronger security provisions, there will be some double locking or double entry, or something of that sort, to secure armouries. Those armouries will be attractive places to go, full of complete weapons. We have already had that debate, and I shall be out of order if I go further on that. The shooting community will certainly take note of what the hon. Gentleman said.

The history of the computerisation and registering of firearms has been bedevilled by the fact that we have so many different police forces. As in so many other areas, this is not a unified operation. The British Shooting Sports Council asked more than five years ago for a civilian firearms board to supervise the issue and monitor the numbers of all shotguns, rifles and revolvers, so that there was a use to be had from such a register.

Until a short time ago, if a firearm was discovered late on a Friday evening by one police force, there was no way in which all the other police forces in the country could be asked whether it was on their register. Thirteen police forces use one sort of computer, six use another, and the others all deal with some separate system. In any event, the systems are not connected by telephone.

The system of registering firearms was not responsive to the needs of the police. That seemed pretty crazy to us, so we proposed an independent board. We believed that that would be cheaper and more efficient. We visualised it being staffed by ex-firearms officers or armourers, or people with an expert knowledge of shooting and shooters. A firearms officer would get to know all the shooting fraternity in the county and the dealers, and would be well in with the shooting world.

Prejudice broke in somewhere. After an amazing series of reports by various accountants, the Home Office finally came up with a figure of £10 million a year to run such a service. For about 1.1 million shotguns and, let us say, about 500,000 rifles and revolvers—I forget the exact total—that seemed rather a lot of money. Sadly, we have never seen some of the accountancy reports behind that decision.

A central register would go some way towards providing a practical response that the shooters are perfectly happy about. We have no worry about details of our weapons and their numbers being kept on a computer. We want the machinery to be useful. Nothing is more purposeless than bureaucracy with no pay-off.

I do not say that we welcome the precise terms of the new clause, but we are prepared to accept it. We can see some good coming out of it. When she starts to deal with the practicalities of the Bill, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will impress firmly on the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) the necessity of the police forces talking to each other by computer. It is ludicrous that they are so far apart in this day and age.

Some of those measures will cost money that will have to come out of other budgets. The Home Office has dragged its feet on the issue. The shooting fraternity can

rightly say that it has pressed the Home Office on the issue without success. It has needed a disaster of the sort that we have had before any action is taken. This is at least a step in the right direction.

Mr. Frank Cook: I shall speak on this amendment because of the Minister's response to my accusation of negligence during the debate on the limitation of time motion. She announced that there were proposals for a register later in the Bill. I was pleased to hear that—until I looked at the proposals.

Hon. Members will remember that, when describing the procedures for the Metropolitan police, I identified six agencies that are checked by a certificating officer before any certificate is issued: he checks with the domestic violence unit; he checks with the local intelligence officer; he checks section SO18 for adult cautions; he checks the police national computer for convictions; he checks with Infos, the intelligence pool; and he checks the general registry, which is a library of all surplus files of unfounded allegations that have no result.

That is fine for London. The certificating officer can expose a Jack the lad who has been anti-social and would appear unsuitable for the custodianship of a weapon, but if the same Jack the lad disappears to Sussex, there is no guarantee that the local constabulary will conduct the same inquiry.

The provision in Lords amendment No. 71 for a register of holders of shotgun and firearms certificates would therefore tell of those who have been successful and perhaps those who have applied and not got a certificate, but it will not give the full reasons. It will still be possible, not for someone to move out of London and get one elsewhere, but for someone who has been refused one elsewhere to move to London and get one.

While the move towards a register is a move to the good and I welcome it, I must point out to the Minister that it does not go far enough. Furthermore, it does not take care of the weapons. We need not only a register of holders of firearms, but a register of the weapons themselves. If there are to be legal and illegal weapons, we need to be able to distinguish one from the other. Patently, the provision for that sort of check does not exist under the amendment.

8.30 pm

Further to the comments of the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) about the need for an independent body, we need better provision within the police force for expert opinion. In far too many constabularies, the duties required under previous firearms legislation have been conducted by constables, who have been well intentioned and keen to be conscientious, but who were poorly trained. Frequently, they are moved around—it is said, for career development—from one area to another, so they do not acquire the expertise necessary for consideration of these matters. I hope that the Minister of State will accept my comments and observations in the spirit in which I have made them, and will try to be constructive in her response.

Mr. Dalyell: I am prompted by the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) to say a word about communication.

If police forces had talked to one another—and, frankly, if Members of Parliament and local authorities had talked to one another—the tragedy of Dunblane might not have happened. In 1988, prompted by Mrs. Paula Morby, then of Linlithgow, I was brought face to face with the case of Thomas Hamilton. That lady complained bitterly that she was unhappy about her son being taken away to camp by a man she did not care for at all. Incidentally, all I am saying now was said to the Cullen inquiry and to the police.

To cut a long story short, Hamilton came to my surgery and subsequently to my house, and was extremely angry that I had brought the police into what he would call the destruction of his boys' club in Linlithgow. Eventually, when he moved out of Linlithgow, I did little more about it, other than talk to my then parliamentary colleague Alex Eadie, who then represented Midlothian.

There were two things that we did not know. The first was that Hamilton was moving around the country. Had I pooled knowledge with my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), who had had similar experiences, or with my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), it might all have been different, but it never occurred to us to swap information. I think that I speak for my colleagues in saying that none of us had the slightest notion that that man was involved with guns.

I have drawn the conclusion—hindsight is a wonderful thing, incidentally—that in future there must be communication. It is a double-edged sword, as there can be communication on great unfairnesses between individuals, but this is a matter of judgment, and I do not see how else it can be done. We are entitled to emphasise the importance of communication between police forces.

Miss Widdecombe: The amendment requires the establishment of a national register of firearm and shotgun certificate holders. I can give the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) some reassurance, although perhaps not as much as he would like, inasmuch as one of the categories that he was asking to be covered can be.

The system that we are discussing with the police is called Phoenix, and it will be able to hold details of people who have had firearms or shotgun certificates refused or revoked, so it will not merely be holders. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman. I am afraid that it is as helpful as I can be, and I cannot include the other things he asked for at this juncture on that system.

Mr. Frank Cook: Only eight negligences.

Miss Widdecombe: I am glad to find that they are reduced by one. When the hon. Gentleman studies carefully what we have done, he might reduce the list by some more.

Before I deal with the substance of this debate, I should like to complete, if I may, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I think that I probably may—the comments that I was endeavouring to make before I was cruelly cut off last time.

What I was saying might have sounded negative to the hon. Member for Stockton, North, but only because it was the first half of the sentence, and I did not get to the second half. I was trying to point out that it would not automatically be known if a starter shooter was being investigated, but that the Secretary of State will not

[Miss Widdecombe]

license clubs to have starter shooters unless he is satisfied that their security precautions are good, and, for example, that there is adequate one-to-one supervision.

It is not proposed that starter shooters should be able to go to a club and automatically reach out, take a gun and have unsupervised handling of it. I hope that that is some consolation to the hon. Gentleman. It would be difficult for the grounds that someone was being investigated to act as a criterion alone, because it would presuppose knowledge, which might not be there. Certainly, if a responsible officer of the club were being investigated, there would be a case for closing the club, so there are safeguards.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I suspect that you did not hear me, but I digressed a little.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I heard the right hon. Lady very clearly and concisely. If she had gone further, it would have been brought to her attention.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful for your tolerance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I return to the substance of the amendment, and the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) about the setting up of a central firearms control board to issue certificates. Lord Cullen did not favour the removal from the police of any of the functions concerned with the operation of the present system—that can be found in chapter 8, paragraph 5. We have accepted that recommendation, and agreed with that view.

There was certainly no suggestion that we rejected such a control board simply on the grounds of cost or any such consideration. It was also rejected because such a board would create duplication of effort—there would still be a need for continued police involvement even if a central board were set up.

On that basis, I think that we are right to agree with the Lords in their amendment. We do not see a reason for making a national database a statutory requirement, but we are committed to setting it up, and I therefore do not intend to oppose the amendment.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 72 to 75 agreed to.

Clause 34

POWER OF SEARCH WITH WARRANT

Lords amendment: No. 76, in page 18, line 26, at end insert—

("(3A) The power of a constable or civilian officer under subsection (2)(b) above to seize and detain anything found on any premises or place shall include power to require any information which is kept by means of a computer and is accessible from the premises or place to be produced in a form in which it is visible and legible and can be taken away.")

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The amendment has already been discussed. The hon. Gentleman has missed his opportunity.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 77 and 78, and No. 79 and Government amendment (a) thereto, agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 80 to 83, No. 84 and Government amendment (a) thereto, and No. 85 agreed to.

Clause 36

APPROVED RIFLE CLUBS

Lords amendment: No. 86, in page 20, line 16, at end insert—

("(7A) The power of a constable or civilian officer under subsection (7) above to inspect anything on club premises shall include power to require any information which is kept by means of a computer and is accessible from the premises to be made available for inspection in a visible and legible form.")

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that this, too, has already been discussed.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 87 to 92 and No. 94 agreed to .

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 95, after clause 40, to insert the following new clause—

(".—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make such transitional and consequential provisions and such savings as he considers necessary or expedient in preparation for, in connection with, or in consequence of—

(a) the coming into force of any provision of this Act; or

(b) the operation of any enactment repealed or amended by a provision of this Act during any period when the repeal or amendment is not wholly in force.

(2) Regulations under this section may make modifications of any enactment contained in this or in any other Act.

(3) The power to make regulations under subsection (2) above shall be exercisable by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

8.45 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin: The amendment, which appeared at the 11th hour, appears to someone such as myself—I am not qualified as a barrister—to give sweeping powers to the Home Secretary. I have, however, been given an absolute undertaking that it refers only to the transition period and will help to smooth out minor irregularities and problems.

Bearing in mind the fact that there are those in the shooting community who have got rather overexcited about the provision, I should be very grateful if my right hon. Friend the Minister could explain why it was introduced at such a late stage and repeat the undertaking, so that shooters will not feel that there is a Henry VIII clause at the end of the legislation that will act to their disadvantage, at the Home Secretary's discretion.

Mr. John Carlisle: I endorse my hon. Friend's comments. My right hon. Friend the Minister will not be

surprised to hear that a certain amount of suspicion was aroused among members of the shooting fraternity as this late amendment was bounced into the Bill. Frankly, they felt—I choose my words delicately—somewhat let down by the Government over the whole of the Bill.

This evening's proceedings have been remarkable—almost unique—in that every single speech and intervention, other than those from the Front Benches, has been opposed to the principle of the Bill and to particular items in it. Not one speech has been made entirely in favour of any measure in the Bill—not even the 28-day limit.

Clarification is sought by the shooting fraternity, whose members have been amazingly patient during our proceedings, even about the fact that our debate on some extremely important issues is being unnecessarily truncated this evening, as it was on a previous occasion.

My right hon. Friend the Minister will have noticed that the votes in favour of the Lords amendments on disassembly and compensation for clubs and for dealers were remarkably high. I have no doubt that newspaper headlines tomorrow will say that that has been the biggest revolt of this Parliament so far—a Parliament that is at its fag end. There is deep unhappiness throughout the country, not only among the shooting fraternity, but among those who believe in justice, fairness and generosity, which the Bill has not demonstrated in any measure.

We need a clear explanation that the measure is purely transitional and that the Home Secretary, whoever it may be at the time, will not be able to pick out items for which he or she might have an especial liking and change the Bill before it hits the statute book—on whichever sad day that happens. I know that I speak on behalf of many people who have written to me and of many of my constituents who have expressed deep concern about the Bill and the way in which it has been handled by the Government.

Mr. Dalyell: One of the things that may happen in the transition period is the discovery that many of the clubs to which we have been light-heartedly referring have ceased to exist. It is my understanding that in central Scotland there are only two clubs, neither of which is particularly accessible to my constituents or to a lot of other people.

Another question that it is legitimate to peg to this is: who exactly are the civilian officers who are referred to throughout the Bill, and what qualifications do they have?

Mr. Gill: Like my hon. Friends the Members for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) and for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), I seek an assurance that the powers will be used moderately. There is always a great suspicion that such powers will go far beyond what the House would want.

The House is well aware of the great upset among shooters about the Bill as a whole. They feel that they have been scapegoated for the events of Dunblane. None of us could fail to have been impressed by both the number and the quality of the letters that we have received about the Bill. We are all used to receiving many letters on many subjects, but I have been incredibly impressed by the quality of the letters and the force of the arguments, as well as by the sense of outrage that comes through all the letters from people whose sport is being outlawed.

It is quite without precedent that people who were quietly and peaceably enjoying a sport should find that at the drop of a hat it is no longer legal. There will be continuing unhappiness as a result of the refusal of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to allow for any form of consequential loss for those who have lost their businesses, either as suppliers to the trade or as operators of clubs. None of this ill-conceived, unwelcome, unwarranted legislation does anything to address the problem of firearms that are held without licence—the hundreds of thousands of illegal firearms. There must be some suspicion that, in taking the powers under this amendment, we have not heard the last of this legislation. I hope that I express the sentiments of shooters who have written to hon. Members to draw attention to their grave reservations about the provision.

Finally, I underscore what my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North said about the unprecedented number of Conservative Members who have voted against the Bill at every stage. It is a deeply unpopular measure and it is regrettable that it has come to the House. As a Conservative Member, I have to say that it is not a Conservative measure.

Miss Widdecombe: I give the House an absolute assurance that this is not, and was never intended to be, any sort of Henry VIII clause. The new clause makes it clear that its powers are purely in respect of transitional and consequential provisions, of provisions that are already written into the Bill. It does not give any wider powers to the Secretary of State.

We introduced the powers late, because the fast passage of the Bill and the necessity to introduce tighter controls on firearms in the near future made us decide that over the next few months some minor anomaly might become evident. We wanted to have the necessary powers to deal with that. There is no question whatever, and I say this categorically and give an absolute assurance, of this being a Henry VIII clause.

On the question of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the civilian officers referred to in the Bill are police staff who specialise in firearms licensing. They are often former police or military officers. The hon. Gentleman tried twice to intervene on amendments that had already been theoretically discussed. If he wishes to write to me on either subject, I should be delighted to reply.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments No. 96 and consequential Government amendment (a), No. 97, No. 98 and consequential Government amendment (a), Nos. 99 to 104, No. 105 and consequential Government amendment (a), and Nos. 106 to 115 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Mr. Doug Henderson, Mrs. Jane Kennedy, Mr. David Lidington, Mr. Patrick McLoughlin and Miss Ann Widdecombe; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain Lords amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

TRANSFER OF CROFTING ESTATES (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*]

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (Bills in relation to their principle)),

That the Bill be committed to a Scottish Standing Committee.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

TRANSFER OF CROFTING ESTATES (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) The payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure of the Secretary of State—

(a) in making loans or grants to provide assistance to establish bodies to whom property is to be transferred under that Act and in defraying the legal expenses and other costs of such bodies in connection with the transfer;

(b) in paying compensation in respect of the removal of rights of pre-emption under that Act; and

(2) The payment into the Consolidated Fund of any sums received by the Secretary of State under that Act.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Young People (Alcohol)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

8.56 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South–East): I welcome this opportunity to debate the effects of alcohol on young people, as, I am sure, do many other hon. Members, because we do not often debate the subject. This is not an attempt in any way to attack reputable landlords, pub owners or off-licensees. However, there is a problem among a minority of them.

It seems that there has been a general lack of co-ordination in our approach to the problem. More than 40,000 people die each year from alcohol-related illnesses. Statistics compiled by a voluntary agency called Turning Point show that alcohol is the third biggest killer in the United Kingdom after heart disease and cancer. Many of the effects of alcohol misuse are long term and appear only after many years of abuse, which means that young people do not realise the effects of their drinking until it is too late. Acute intoxication, which occurs after heavy drinking, has a short-term effect that can depress the central nervous system and lead to coma or even death. Long-term effects involve the development of dependency and alcoholism, detrimental effects on the liver and kidneys, memory loss, severe depression and a deterioration in the individual's personal life.

Several surveys and reports have been commissioned in the past few years to discover the extent of alcohol use among children and young people. The most notable findings are that 42 per cent. of 12 to 14-year-olds and 82 per cent. of 15 to 17-year-olds have drunk alcohol. It shows that an extremely large number of young people have experience with alcohol. In 1994, 17 per cent. of 11 to 15-year-olds were regular drinkers, compared with only 13 per cent. in 1990. That points to an increase in the habitual use of alcohol.

A particularly disturbing statistic is the apparent ease with which young people have access to alcohol, with 52 per cent. of 15-year-olds having purchased alcohol at some point. The ease with which under-age drinkers seem to be acquiring alcohol is a major cause for concern. Children appear to obtain alcohol in several ways. The first is by frequenting pubs. It is no secret that young people go to pubs before they are 18. That is not a new phenomenon, but it does not mean that we should be complacent about it. One solution to that aspect of the problem might be to increase the training of managers and staff of licensed premises. They should be made fully aware of their responsibilities as gatekeepers of the licensing laws. Training is also a practical way of ensuring that all pub staff have a knowledge of the licensing laws, thereby limiting the harm to young people.

The second method that young people use to obtain alcohol is by purchasing it at off-licences. It is widely suspected that the bulk of illegal alcohol sales to children are made by a small number of disreputable traders. Those traders are destroying the good name of one of our most successful industries and, at the same time, damaging our children's health. Off-licences could be deterred from selling alcohol to children and youths by increasing the fines that those establishments are required to pay when they are charged with selling alcohol to under-age drinkers.

A third concern is the vast appeal of alcopops to children. Despite the claims of some brewers, this new breed of alcoholic drinks is marketed predominantly at young people. That has led inevitably to such drinks appealing to those under the age of 18 and encouraging them to drink alcohol. Those points were supported by the Advertising Standards Authority ruling in January 1996.

We welcome the efforts that the Department of Health has made in the area of health education, but much remains to be done. There is no strategic approach to tackling the problem—instead the Government have adopted a piecemeal approach. There is a lack of Government funding. As written answers to questions that I tabled before Christmas show, there is no co-ordinated approach across Britain to providing rehabilitation and support to young people who have become dependent on alcohol. The Minister does not even know how much each health authority spends on the problem.

A more thoughtful approach is required in order to tackle the problem. We need a central focus where information may be shared throughout the country about which treatments work and what is happening where. The Coventry and Warwickshire alcohol advisory service in my constituency is running a successful project. An integral part of the project is a student education scheme, which allows young people to research and deliver alcohol education to schools and youth groups in Coventry and Warwickshire. The service provides young people with the necessary information that will enable them to make intelligent decisions about alcohol consumption.

Mr. Brian David Jenkins (South–East Staffordshire): I thank my hon. Friend for drawing attention to the project being run by the Coventry and Warwickshire alcohol advisory service. Is my hon. Friend aware that, despite the success of the service, youth and alcohol workers who are trying to run education programmes find that there are no appropriate, up-to-date materials available? Does he agree that the Government should take a lead on the issue and work with the many interested parties to provide the initiatives necessary to tackle the serious problem of under-age drinking in our towns?

Mr. Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I cannot make the point any better than he has done. We must do more to teach young people throughout Britain about a civilised approach to drinking. We must make them understand that it is neither normal nor acceptable for people—especially young people—to embark on regular drinking binges that leave them in an unconscious state or worse. They must understand that social drinking means only a moderate intake.

The link between alcohol and youth crime is well documented. Too many magistrates too often hear the line, "I was under the influence of alcohol," as an excuse for public disorder or criminal behaviour. Some 44 per cent. of the victims of violent crime described their assailants as being drunk, and alcohol is associated with 60 per cent. to 70 per cent. of homicides, 70 per cent. of stabbings and 70 per cent. of beatings. In 88 per cent. of cases involving criminal damage and in 90 per cent. of those involving public disorder, the defendants were either drunk or had admitted to having consumed a significant amount of alcohol. It is therefore not surprising that the Home Office's own statistics—the British crime survey—show that people have come to associate drunken behaviour with crime and that they become wary of young people who are drinking.

Alcohol-related crime and disorder must be taken more seriously. There need to be more appropriate punishments for drunken behaviour and those who persistently offend should attend programmes designed to tackle their dependency. The drinks industry has an important role to play in the campaign. All producers, distributors and retailers should be required to adhere to a mandatory code of practice to ensure that their products do not disproportionately appeal to the under-age drinker.

A Department for Education and Employment circular that encouraged schools to provide substance misuse education only briefly touched on alcohol. We cannot simply add alcohol advice to any campaign against drugs, because they are two completely different problems. The Department for Education and Employment should ensure that students are taught that the culture that makes alcohol a symbol of status, power and mystique is wrong.

9.5 pm

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South–East (Mr. Cunningham) on having initiated the debate and I am grateful to him and to the Minister for allowing me some of their time to participate.

I should declare an interest: I am the chairman of the all-party group on alcohol misuse and, like all hon. Members, I recognise the risk that alcohol poses to our young people. Survey after survey has shown that children and teenagers are starting to drink alcohol at an earlier age than ever before and that they are drinking more and more on each occasion. That is a worrying trend and, if we are to reverse it, we shall need a strategy that focuses on the range of alcohol-related issues and not only on the problem of young people drinking in public, important though that is.

Alcohol is a greater risk to young people than Ecstasy and other drugs, yet little media attention is paid to it or to the warnings given of the dangers it poses to young people. We all remember Leah Betts and know of the tragic circumstances of her death; but I wonder how many hon. Members remember the name of Lindsay Grant? Lindsay was a 15-year-old on holiday in north Wales who died last year after drinking half a bottle of vodka. Only *The Times* newspaper covered her tragic story and I refer to it in order to show the complete contrast with the massive publicity given to any drug-related death. There was no public outcry at Lindsay's death, despite her parents' warning of the dangers to young people from alcohol. That highlights the unwillingness of the public, the media and policy makers to acknowledge that the risks posed by alcohol are as great as, if not greater than, those posed by drugs.

The problem of alcohol and young people can start to be properly identified only if we have in place a system for collecting data from the accident and emergency departments on the number of children and teenagers attending as a result of alcohol poisoning or other drink-related accidents. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of under-15s being admitted to hospital accident and emergency units with alcohol poisoning has risen tenfold from 1,000 recorded cases a year in the 1980s. Those figures need to be quantified, because there

[Mr. Don Touhig]

is currently a major gap in the collection of this sort of information by the national health service. Accumulation of information is important if we are to highlight the serious nature of the problem.

That is why I find it astonishing that the Government have decided to suspend the general household survey, which was the most useful measure of levels and patterns of alcohol consumption. Losing that survey will affect our ability to track progress towards the targets on alcohol consumption in "The Health of the Nation" White Paper. I hope that the Government might be persuaded to reconsider their decision on the future of that survey.

I am sure that the Minister is aware of the development of the so-called designer drinks and alcopops mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South–East. Those sweet-tasting drinks, with their sexy names and flashy bottles, have a high alcohol content. At 5.5 per cent., they are often stronger than many beers and ciders. Their taste gives them a particular appeal to children and teenagers.

Recent research carried out by the university of Strathclyde has shown how popular those designer drinks are with children between the ages of 12 and 17. Alcopops and designer drinks are already making a worrying situation worse, and there is genuine anxiety that the marketing of them is legitimising an illicit activity—under-age drinking.

I understand that Whitbread has promised to put on sale alcoholic "slush" drinks and milkshake-based alcoholic drinks. If that is true, I consider it to be grossly irresponsible. It is vital that we have solid regulations to ensure that these drinks do not appeal to the under-18s.

If we are serious about tackling alcohol misuse among children and teenagers, it is important that we teach those young people a safer approach to drinking, not one that aims only to prevent under-age purchase of alcohol. We must set up initiatives that involve parents, teachers, youth workers, the police and children. We need a national alcohol strategy, as I believe that that is the only way in which we shall tackle alcohol-related problems among young people.

Tackling, alcohol misuse among young people needs to be given a much higher priority in this country than is currently the case.

9.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member for Coventry, South–East (Mr. Cunningham) for raising this important issue today and for the contribution by the hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig). As they will appreciate, the Government take the issue very seriously, and I hope to reassure them tonight that the Government do have an important strategy for tackling not only the problems of drinking by young people and under-age drinking, but the whole issue of alcohol, alcohol abuse and "The Health of the Nation" in the context of alcohol.

We have been aware of a growing volume of public concern about alcopops—a matter which both hon. Gentlemen mentioned—since they began to appear in the summer of 1995, and we have kept a close eye on developments since then. We share the hon. Gentlemen's concerns about their potential appeal to young people so, in the Budget in November 1996, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer increased the duty on them to bring them into line with beers of similar strength. From 1 January 1996, the duty on drinks of up to 5.5 per cent. alcohol by volume was increased by more than 40 per cent.—raising the tax on a bottle by between 7p and 8p a bottle.

Both hon. Gentlemen mentioned statistical evidence and information. There is a growing body of anecdotal and ad hoc survey evidence about the effects of these types of drinks on under-age drinkers. I am sure that both hon. Gentlemen have read the results of all the recently published surveys that have been reported in the press, which purport to show that these drinks have a significant appeal to teenagers, especially girls, and that younger teenagers may indeed be the main group to whom these drinks appeal.

A couple of weeks ago, the *British Medical Journal* reported a survey by the Centre for Social Marketing at the university of Strathclyde—which the hon. Member for Islwyn mentioned—which found that 14 and 15-year-olds found so-called designer drinks especially appealing, whereas 16 to 17-year-olds tended to regard them as childish drinks. Other surveys have shown that they may be perceived to be less strong than traditional drinks and easier to buy.

Although those reports are all matters of considerable concern to us, we feel that we lack reliable and comprehensive data about national consumption by young drinkers, especially comparable data over time on which to base conclusions about the effects of these drinks.

We have been collecting data on young people's drinking since 1988, and I hope that the hon. Member for Islwyn is especially reassured that we have been doing that by means of the biennial teenage drinking survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics. The hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the most recent survey was carried out during October and November last year, and that some results should be available by Easter this year. They will show whether teenage drinking has increased since the introduction of alcopops in 1995, and will give us more detailed information than has been available so far on who is drinking alcopops and how much those people are drinking.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): How much of the revenue collected from alcopops has been given to local authorities to combat their misuse?

Mr. Burns: It is rather difficult to give statistics of that nature. As the hon. Gentleman will appreciate from what I said earlier, the tax increase introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in November came into effect only on 1 January this year, so we have not had enough time to come up with such calculations. I can, however, tell the hon. Gentleman that through our general funding of the national health service—which, as he will know, has increased year on year on year on year in real terms under the present Government—money has been available to cater for the health needs of those who suffer from problems involving alcohol and, moreover, those suffering from more classical types of illness and from the effects of drug abuse. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman.

As I was saying, I hope that the results of the teenage drinking survey carried out last autumn will show us whether teenage drinking has increased since the introduction of alcopops in 1995, and will give us more detailed information than has been available so far on who is drinking alcopops and how much those people are drinking. At present, we have no consistent evidence available to us to suggest that alcopops are increasing the overall level of under-age drinking, or that the new-style drinks are supplanting the more traditional beer and cider. What information we have can sometimes be contradictory, which is why I consider it so important for us to have the results of the survey at Easter. We can then gain a better idea of exactly what is going on. As soon as we have accurate information, it will be easier for us to determine what steps we need to take in addition to those that we are already taking as part of our strategy to deal with alcohol abuse generally.

Although the Government lack consistent and comparable time series data to allow us to draw sensible conclusions about the effects of alcopops, we are tackling under-age drinking on a number of fronts—through legislation and, just as important, through better education and awareness of the effects of drinking. I hope that that will reassure the hon. Gentlemen, both of whom rightly mentioned the critical role that education must play and the actions that we can take, beyond education, to show that sensible drinking at the right age—and, of course, it is illegal to sell alcohol to those who are under age—will minimise the potential for health problems and other difficulties that young people may experience as they enter their 20s and, indeed, in later life.

Our education policy is well established. We believe that schools, colleges and the youth service should encourage young people to develop responsible attitudes to alcohol consumption. Young people need to learn how to make sensible choices about whether, when and how much to drink, and to resist persuasion and peer pressure to drink inappropriately or to excess.

The interdepartmental group reviewing the Government's sensible drinking message was very concerned about young people's drinking, as hon. Members would expect. In a report published in December 1995, it recognised the risks for young people drinking alcohol in unsafe amounts, and the responsibility of parents in regard to their children's introduction to alcohol. It added that young people needed to be aware of the specific risks from excessive drinking related to their life styles, and of the need to minimise those risks to prevent harm to themselves and others. To get the key messages across, we have been working since then with the Health Education Authority to produce health education materials offering advice to young people. A new campaign targeting young drinkers was launched by the HEA in the middle of January to highlight the risks of "binge" drinking and to encourage a more mature approach towards alcohol.

An interactive campaign Internet site—for those who are aficionados of the Internet, it is www.wrecked.co.uk—gives down-to-earth facts about drinking and the chance for youngsters to send their own messages and receive free campaign materials. I am sure that the House will be pleased to know, and it is certainly heartening from our point of view, that on its first day, 17 January this year, the site received 1,199 visitors.

In addition, a leaflet aimed at families to promote discussion of alcohol issues between young people and their parents has also been produced. More materials planned for later in the year will highlight the risks of getting drunk and satirise the "drunk" culture that is prevalent, sadly, among young people in particular—the notion that it is clever, trendy and acceptable for people to abuse alcohol on social occasions and, even more worryingly, on their own.

It is interesting to observe the way in which attitudes to drink-driving have changed over the past 10 or 15 years, partly or perhaps almost exclusively as a result of education. Fifteen years ago, however irresponsible it may seem now, if a friend or acquaintance was caught drink-driving, there was sympathy for that person because of all the trouble that he would have if he was unable to drive to work, drive socially and so on. Now it has become firmly established in the minds of the vast majority of people in this country that drink-driving is totally unacceptable. It is a fine achievement that that message has got across, and that society's attitudes towards drink-driving have changed so dramatically.

Through education and example, we must bring about a change of attitude, especially among young people, towards drinking and, in particular, under-age drinking, to ensure that it is not considered clever, socially acceptable or de rigueur when going out with one's friends to get drunk out of one's brain. People must be made aware of the dangers to health resulting from such an irresponsible action, the anti-social behaviour that it can create and the fact that it is not amusing for other people to be in the presence of someone who is drunk and sadly making a fool of himself.

We are not so naive as to pretend that young people will not encounter drink problems, or that members of their family will not do so. That is one of the reasons why we support Drinkline, a national alcohol helpline providing confidential information, advice and a support service for anyone, regardless of age, who is concerned about his own or someone else's drinking. Drinkline also provides information on appropriate local services and has produced "The Big Blue Book of Booze," a guide to sensible drinking, especially targeted at young people.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South–East raised the subject of licensing. I remind the House of a fact that is all too often overlooked: it is an offence to sell alcohol to a person under the age of 18. It is also an offence for a person under 18 to buy it. That applies to all alcoholic drinks above a certain strength, including alcopops.

We strengthened the law in 1988 by placing the onus of responsibility for checking a customer's age firmly on the licensee. Previously, sale to someone under 18 had to be done "knowingly" for an offence to be committed. Now anyone charged with that offence must show that he exercised all due diligence in trying to prevent the sale, or that he had no reason to suspect that the customer was under the age of 18. That provides a reasonable degree of protection for licensees faced with the difficult task of establishing a customer's true age, but ensures that all licensees take their responsibilities seriously.

I welcome the Portman Group's initiative, and other initiatives throughout the country. For example, licensees and publicans have introduced identification card schemes before they will sell alcohol to young people or people who may be under the age of 18. That is an important

[Mr. Burns]

step forward because it helps to minimise the problem. I would like more publicans and licensees to take up the Portman scheme or introduce their own schemes to minimise the potential and temptation to sell alcohol to those who are under age.

In 1988, we increased to £1,000 the maximum fine for selling alcohol to people under 18.

We are all concerned about how young people behave if they succeed in getting hold of alcoholic drinks. Because of the problems associated with public drinking in some areas, in 1990 we made available to local authorities a model byelaw that makes it an offence for a person to continue drinking alcohol in a designated public area after being warned by a police constable not to do so. A number of local authorities have now adopted that byelaw or are in the process of doing so. I pay tribute to the city of Coventry, which was a pioneer in the creation of the byelaw. I wish that my own local authority of Chelmsford in Essex had followed Coventry's example a few years ago.

That byelaw is an important step forward, but it is not all-embracing, because, as the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East will know, it does not carry a power of arrest or confiscation. Nor is it directed only at young people.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: As the Minister will be aware, one of the conditions of the byelaw is that if a policeman arrests somebody whom he suspects may have an alcohol problem, the police involve the social services department. That is the case in Coventry. I know that that is true of other cities as well, and it is very useful in trying to help people.

Mr. Burns: I would not disagree with the hon. Gentleman in any way about that. It is a helpful additional power for the police constable in tackling the problem.

Because the byelaw does not provide direct powers of arrest or confiscation, the Government support the private Member's Bill that is being promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), which will give the police the power to confiscate alcohol from under-age people drinking in public. As the House will know, that Bill is currently proceeding through the House. I hope that it will reach the statute book before the general election—whenever that may be—because it is an important measure that tries to deal with the problem.

As I said in reply to a parliamentary question that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East asked last November, the Government believe that self-regulation by the industry is the most effective way to control alcohol advertising. That issue was raised briefly earlier in the debate. We welcome the very responsible approach that the Portman Group and its members took in drawing up the voluntary code of practice for the packaging, marketing and sale of alcoholic drinks, in response to concerns about alcoholic soft drinks and their appeal to young people.

As I am sure hon. Members are aware, the code, which was published last April, seeks to prevent the supply of all alcoholic drinks, not just alcopops, to under-18s, by requiring that brand names, packaging and merchandising are not targeted at them, and that retailers take particular care to ensure that alcohol is not purchased by under-18s.

We welcome the Portman Group's further moves to raise the code's profile with the general public, because that is crucial. It has now appointed a fully independent panel to consider complaints about breaches of the code. It will allow the Portman Group to offer an advisory service on new products, knowing that its advice will not be prejudicial to the consideration of any subsequent complaints, as these will be considered by the independent panel. We welcome that further development and the Portman Group's other activities regarding young people and drinking. Notable among those is its youth task force, which aims to identify the influences on under-age drinking, implement pilot projects on education and retail training, and make recommendations to the Government, local government and service providers. We look forward to seeing its findings and recommendations, which are due in the autumn. The Government are continuing to monitor the industry's response closely and shall certainly want to take stock again after the first year of operation of the code.

The Government have not been impressed by recent reports of developments in broader alcohol marketing, such as alcopop home-brew kits, alcoholic slush puppies, to which the hon. Member for Islwyn referred, and sachets of alcohol marketed as "alcotots". Although the manufacturers of those innovations often sit outside the conventional drinks industry that is represented by the Portman Group and hence are not signatories to the code, it is surely right that they are seen as part of the totality of the alcohol industry. It is up to the industry in all its forms to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the public and the Government that it can regulate itself effectively regarding alcohol products.

As the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East will appreciate, we take the problem of under-age drinking extremely seriously. Like everyone else, we are all too aware of the misery, hardship and problems that it causes not only to individuals but to their families and the impact that it has in general on society and innocent people.

We are keeping the situation very much under review and considering options for the future. We would not, however, want to act precipitously while we are short of national time series data on alcohol consumption levels of under-age drinkers. Nor would we want to act before the Portman Group's latest changes to the operation of its code of practice have been given time to take effect—certainly not before its code has had at least a year of operation, which will be by spring this year.

I once again assure hon. Members that we are fully aware of the problems, as they would expect. We fully share their concern. I hope that they accept my assurances that we have a strategy for tackling the problem. We have a full education initiative in operation not only through Health Education Authority advertising, but in schools and colleges—as I mentioned—and the national curriculum. Alcohol abuse is as important as drug abuse. We are waiting for data so that we do not have to rely solely on anecdotal information. In the light of hard data, we will be able to see the best way forward in trying to minimise the problems that blight so many people, families and, inevitably, communities.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 19 February 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Further Education

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this important issue. Most hon. Members probably attended a further education or sixth form college, or a sixth form in a school. As most of us have benefited from further education, it is only right, fair and proper that we should take an interest in the sector when it faces such difficulties.

Further education colleges play a vital role as centres of opportunity and learning. They add social and economic value to their communities. The 357 colleges in England and Wales educate more than 3 million students. I make no apologies for the remarks that I shall make on the situation in east Lancashire. I have received much correspondence, both from the college in my constituency and from those in neighbouring constituencies.

The crisis in further education adversely affects its students, lecturers and institutions. From the point of view of staff, incorporation has been nothing less than a disaster. It has led to worsening conditions of service and many redundancies. My local college, Accrington and Rossendale, is due to have its inspection report published early next month. Early signs are that it will get a good report, with staff awarded the highest praise and marks possible. Their reward will be further undermining, underfunding and redundancies. Across the sector, more than 10,000 jobs have been lost since incorporation in 1993.

There is a damaging dispute at my local college. It centres on the case of Mr. Pat Walsh, the senior union official in the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education. He claims that he was sacked by the college because of his trade union activities. The college governing body claims that he was genuinely made redundant. NATFHE is balloting tomorrow for strike action. If it goes ahead, it will be at a damaging time for students in the run-up to public examinations. All that one can say with certainty about this fiasco is that, whatever the failings of the previous system—and there were failings—such disasters did not happen before the incorporation of colleges.

Some people in my constituency want to blame the governing body for the appalling state of affairs. I reject that. I want to lay the blame fairly and squarely where it belongs: at the door of the Minister, the Government and the Further Education Funding Council, which has created a severely flawed funding mechanism for colleges.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Is it not true that in Lancashire—and, I am sure, in the rest of the country—there was better co-operation between colleges before incorporation? We did not get duplication and competition, and therefore had better use of resources. That has been damaged since incorporation.

Mr. Pope: My hon. Friend makes an important point. One problem is the tension between providers. Training and enterprise councils pull in one direction and colleges in another. Where is the co-ordination between education and training? There is very little co-ordination between the two. We now have the spectacle, as my hon. Friend said, of neighbouring colleges with mushrooming marketing budgets competing in the marketplace and offering very similar courses. They are fighting each other for the same students. It is ridiculous that, in our part of the world, Blackburn, Accrington and Rossendale, Burnley, and Nelson and Colne colleges offer similar courses, competing for the same students.

There is a democratic deficit in the sector. The Further Education Funding Council is yet another Government-appointed quango—a tame mouthpiece for the Government. There is a strong case for democratising the Further Education Funding Council's structure. Often, colleges have little or no accountability to the communities that they serve. I am not suggesting that the colleges should be returned to local education authority control—I do not think that anyone is suggesting that. However, there is a strong case for reforming college governing bodies, to increase openness and improve accountability to local communities.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that there are colleges—Newham college of further education is one—where attempts are being made to meet the needs of the community by establishing close connections? Our concern is that there seems to disagreement among the three statutory bodies, perhaps even among the Treasury and the Department for Education and Employment, over the changes in the demand-led element, which have caused enormous problems in colleges that have been integrated into the community and are trying to meet community needs.

Mr. Pope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I shall refer later to the fiasco of the demand-led element; catching up with the Government's flip-flops on that policy is quite an art form.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): My hon. Friend referred to a fiasco. We are also concerned about the problem in Stoke-on-Trent college, where there has been a fiasco. Does he agree that we face a problem in terms of lack of accountability over the way in which the Further Education Funding Council was set up? Does he also agree that the National Audit Office report does not address accountability? When my hon. Friend further considers the problems faced by his college, despite the best efforts of its staff, will he also consider how we may address the problem of deficits across the country, including Stoke-on-Trent?

Mr. Pope: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The problems at Accrington and Rossendale college are replicated, almost exactly, at Stoke, Burnley and Nelson and Colne colleges and other colleges throughout the country. Early-day motion 452, which has attracted

[Mr. Pope]

the signatures of more than 100 hon. Members representing every part of the country, shows that the problem is not specific to my college or my part of east Lancashire, but exists in every part of the country.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North–East): I can confirm that the position in Bolton is extremely serious. The principal, Mr. Hogan, has written to me to say that he feels that the funding cuts are disastrous. The managing director of the focus training group, Mr. Heathcote, who has built up what I believe to be Britain's leading gymnastic training instruction course, says that to have such a sudden cut imposed with so little warning will have a desperate effect on the future of his business.

Mr. Pope: The hon. Gentleman also makes an important point, to which I shall refer later. In Bolton and in colleges throughout the country, as a result of Government action over the demand-led element, student numbers will decrease, courses will be cut, and people on continuing courses will be left high and dry without proper support, which is a disgrace.

When the colleges agreed with the Government that they would expand—it was a Government initiative to get the colleges to expand—it was also agreed that, if growth exceeded the FEFC targets, the excess would be funded at demand-led element rates. Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, students eligible under schedule 2 were to be funded by either core, marginal or demand-led element rates.

Now, colleges that have expanded at the behest of the Government are being penalised for having done so. Although the Government have belatedly and rather grudgingly accepted that they must pay the £84 million that colleges are owed for the rest of this academic year, the DLE is still to be abolished in the next academic year, 1997-98.

It is even harder for the colleges to accept that there was never any suggestion that the 1996-97 payments from the FEFC were insecure until they received the out-of-the-blue letter from the Minister on 28 January. The Government's hypocrisy is incredible: they have gone back on commitments that they made to the colleges; they have betrayed their own claims to be the party committed to expansion and diversity in further education; and they have disregarded the achievements that colleges have made as they strive to meet the national training and education targets laid down for them.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North–East): Has my hon. Friend seen the letter from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), dated 10 January, in which she reaffirmed the demand-led element of the funding formula, only for that element to be withdrawn two and a half weeks later?

Mr. Pope: It was withdrawn after two and a half weeks, and then there was another flip-flop in early February. It is interesting that the letter was sent to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), many of whose constituents attend my local college who, sadly, is not in his place today.

The Government's behaviour has startled the principals, many of whom are long-serving principals of colleges. Recently, the principal of St. Mary's Roman Catholic sixth form college in Blackburn, an excellent institution with a fine academic record—a point unrelated to the fact that I was educated there—described the problem when he said that colleges that had exceeded the target were now being "savagely penalised". The principal of Accrington and Rossendale college said in a letter to me that the Government's actions were "unforgivable".

The fact that the Government will not be funding the DLE for the FEFC means that budgets of an already economically ruined sector will be thrown into further disrepair. I shall outline the track record of a Government who have been in office for 18 years. One in five colleges are in a weak financial position; one in five full-time teaching posts have been lost since 1993; and the further loss of the DLE funds will mean that more job losses are to come.

I understand that Nelson and Colne college, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice)—I am sure that he will want to raise the issue if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—has announced that 47 jobs might have to go in the coming year. In real terms, the 1996 budget removes £233.3 million from the sector for the period 1996-97 to 1999-2000.

The absence of DLE funding in the coming academic year means that up to 11 million funding units that it supports will not have funds for that year—that amounts to about 105,000 enrolments. Given that many of those institutions are already in a weak financial position, absorbing those costs will be hard. The only choice open to colleges will be to lower enrolments, which will go against the policy of expansion and diversity that they have been working so hard to succeed in over the past three to four years.

Many principals feel insulted that their institutions have had to present three-year business plans while the Government can make major funding changes and withdraw pension entitlements with practically no notice.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Did my hon. Friend hear the "Today" programme this morning, on which it was suggested that there might be yet another flip-flop on pensions at 50? If that announcement can be made on "Today", why cannot the Minister tell the House the position now?

Mr. Pope: I heard that announcement on Radio 4; Ministers seem happier to announce changes of policy to the BBC than to the House of Commons. What the Government are doing over teachers' pensions is to saddle an incoming Labour Government with the problem rather than face it themselves in the run-up to the election—a squalid arrangement.

Major changes have been announced at very short notice. That means that much of the planning done by colleges is now worthless. Contractual agreements with companies mean that colleges have had to base their calculations on the DLE rates, which will be unavailable from September 1997. My local college, Accrington and Rossendale, has a successful collaboration with British Aerospace, a large employer in Lancashire, but the calculations that the college has made for contracts with, businesses and students are now rendered meaningless by the Government's actions. The nature of those changes in funding means that courses, especially those of a vocational nature, might end up being cut.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The experience on our side of the Pennines mirrors many of the same

characteristics as that on my hon. Friend's side. We are seeing a parallel to what happened in higher education. Once there ceases to be a dynamic in higher education, the ability is lost to plan or even to enter into private finance initiative agreements, and that is now happening in further education, where there is no planning and no future for growth, experiment or innovation, because from now on there will be no growth.

Mr. Pope: That is absolutely right. We are witnessing the consequences of Ministers in the Department for Education and Employment having consistently, year on year on year, lost the argument with the Treasury in the spending round. All they are doing is shifting cuts round within their Department's budget. Two or three years ago, cuts were in the schools—teachers were laid off and there was a crisis; now the crisis is in higher and further education.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman is describing increased funding and increased activity in the sector as cuts. He is entitled to do so, but only if he tells us how much in his judgment—the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), is in America, so he will not hear—a Labour Government should give that sector.

Mr. Pope: It really is pathetic that, after 18 years, Conservative Members are unable to take any responsibility for the disaster that they have created. All they want to know is what a Labour Government would do. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman accepts that there will be a Labour Government and, in two months' time, he can ask my hon. Friends at Education and Employment questions. I have no intention of trying to foresee how in the next financial year we shall right the wrongs of the Conservative Government.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): The stupidity of the question that my hon. Friend has just been asked is explained by the fact that the demand-led element is not cash-limited. It is like asking us: to how many pensioners will a Labour Government pay a pension? The fact is, we shall pay pensions because they are demand-led by the number of pensioners. In this case, the DLE operates on exactly the same basis—it is not cash-limited, contrary to the spin that was put on it in the early days.

Mr. Pope: Not only is my hon. Friend right, but the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is showing his ignorance of the system. Next month, the Further Education Funding Council will have to enter into funding arrangements for the next academic year, and it will do so on the basis that the DLE has been scrapped. It is therefore impossible for us to give a commitment on how we shall approach the DLE system in the next financial year, when we shall be in government. I should have thought that even the hon. Gentleman could grasp that.

The changes in funding mean that vocational courses are especially vulnerable and minority subjects, such as languages, may become entirely the preserve of the private sector. Student numbers will undoubtedly fall—an extraordinary U-turn in Government policy—and many of those could-have-been students will join the ranks of the unemployed, where they will be able to meet those who might have been their lecturers.

How can colleges make sensible forward planning decisions when the Government seem to be capable of changing funding allocations almost at whim and without any proper consultation with colleges? Given that many further education courses are two years long, should not proper notice have been given to the colleges of changes of such enormity? Alternatively, could not the proposed changes have been phased in, instead of it being announced, first, that funding would simply disappear halfway through this academic year, and then that it would disappear at the end of the academic year? Is the truth that the Government do not care about the consequences of their actions for colleges and students?

This is a sector in crisis. Since 1990, student numbers have more than doubled, yet at the same time funds have decreased by 34 per cent. Thousands of jobs have gone and thousands of lecturers are still in dispute over their contracts of employment. Part-time lecturers are replacing full-time lecturers and, in some colleges—my local college being one example—all the part-time lecturers have been sacked on the last day of the academic year and told that they will be taken back only if they sign up with an agency.

Is that how we want to run a stable further education system? Unsurprisingly, morale is at rock bottom: a recent independent survey showed that 60 per cent. of lecturers are thinking of leaving the profession permanently. The real victims are students, who are trying to learn and better themselves in intolerable circumstances.

Faced with that crisis, the Minister has taken a leaf out of the Prime Minister's book. He has shown no leadership and no vision; he has dithered, and he and his colleagues bear a heavy responsibility for the sorry state of further education today.

9.55 am

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I welcome the opportunity to respond to the remarks of the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope). His language is, to put it mildly, intemperate—he uses words such as "sector in crisis" and "fiasco", refers to no planning and no future and says that people are insulted. We should be asking whether he is making a spending pledge—if he is, the taxpayer should be told. It is all very well for him to criticise, but he has not come up with any answers.

I do not believe that we have anything of which to be ashamed—in fact, we have a record of which we can be proud. We have changed the landscape in offering opportunities to young people, and the climate has changed dramatically for young men and women. It is not only those from educated middle-class homes who have benefited, but those from deprived or impoverished backgrounds who have been given opportunities that are second to none to lift themselves up. The social pattern across Britain has changed entirely as a result of the new educational opportunities that we have created.

I recall the remarks made by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). He is factually wrong when he claims that 80 per cent. of children of unskilled parents leave school at 16 and make no further progress in education. The truth is that more than half the children of unskilled parents stay on in further education, becoming in the process professional people such as doctors, lawyers or accountants—even entering the House of Commons. That figure is changing all the time.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

We have created a culture in which aspirations to acquiring more skills, qualifications and training are the norm; where opportunities are available to all those who seek them; and where parents are more supportive than ever in encouraging their children to develop. That is the picture of further education today.

The net result is that our further education programme is bursting with activity. It is the normal right and expectation of young people to continue their education after school. One in three go on to further and higher education, compared with one in eight in 1979, when we had a Labour Government. To put it a different way, the number of students has risen to more than 1.3 million—an increase of over 320 per cent. in 25 years—and we now have the highest graduation rate of any country in the European Union except Denmark. All that is in great contrast to the picture painted by the hon. Member for Hyndburn.

Mr. Rooker: Does the hon. Lady realise that the figures that she is quoting relate not to further education but to higher education? There are more than 2 million students in higher education in addition to the million-plus in further education. Her lack of knowledge shows that she is simply reading from a central office brief.

Lady Olga Maitland: That was a good attempt. The truth is that we are looking at the breadth of education—it is hair splitting to claim that we are examining only further education. Young people today participate in all sorts of education—they do not stop at further education.

Mr. Spearing *rose—*

Lady Olga Maitland: I am sorry, but I must make some progress as many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

It is interesting to study a breakdown of student performance. Some 75 per cent. of 16 to 18-year-olds are in structured education and training. That is an increase on 1985, when the figure was only 56 per cent. In 1995, 69 per cent. of students gained qualifications at level 2 of GNVQ by age 19, compared with 46 per cent. in 1985. There have been record passes at GCSE and A-level. Last year, 44 per cent. of 15-year-olds achieved five or more good GCSE passes, compared with 23 per cent. who did not achieve any grades in 1979. Some 29 per cent. of students achieved two or more A-levels, compared with just 14 per cent. in 1979. Those figures tell us that further education is alive and well.

Mr. Spearing: Further to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), whatever the correctness of the hon. Lady's figures and her general view, does she agree that the conditions of funding for further education—as distinct from higher education—have changed in the past few days and have thrown the education funding pattern into organisational and financial chaos? That is what we are worried about. Will the hon. Lady admit that that is true?

Lady Olga Maitland: No, I will not. The truth is that further education funding is secure, and we are going great guns. We must judge the success of further education by the pupils' results. We must consider not just students' performance in further education, but what the next phase will be. Young people spend probably 15 years preparing for their first job, and our task is to ensure that the economic climate remains robust and strong enough to provide employment opportunities.

In an increasingly educated and competitive world, we must have a highly skilled and educated work force. It would be a cheap and mean trick to let students down and dash their great hopes and expectations by systematically ruining their chances of staying on at school. The Labour party's proposals would do just that. For a start, Labour would make it increasingly difficult for young people to stay on at school. The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has announced plans to withdraw child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds. That £560 per year, or £1,120 over two years of essential learning, assists the poorest parents in particular. The proposal would crucify young people's chances of staying on in education, and they would be forced to work in menial or unskilled fields. It would be a tax on learning.

Mr. Sheerman: I am listening carefully to the hon. Lady, and much of her argument is extremely interesting. However, she has had no experience of publicly funded education. Many young people seek further and higher education opportunities. The Government have denied them those opportunities in the past few days, and have said, "We've got enough university graduates." What sort of opportunity growth is that?

Lady Olga Maitland: The biggest threat to children's educational opportunities is the imposition of a teenage tax, which would prevent them from staying on at school and taking advantage of further education. The row within the Labour party about the teenage tax has created a split between the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, who believes that it is a good idea to tax the teenagers, and the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who says the opposite. The Child Poverty Action Group is totally opposed to the measure.

The proposed windfall tax on utilities would do nothing to assist young people: first, it is likely to be illegal; and, secondly, if it were introduced, it is doubtful that it would raise the anticipated £3 billion. For example, the decision by British Gas to reduce prices in order to benefit the consumer would wipe out the alleged "excess profits". There would be no honeypot. On 15 May last year, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East admitted that the windfall tax would raise only "hundreds of millions of pounds", and not the multi-billion figure that would be needed to fund Labour's spending plans.

In any case, that is a one-off measure that would not create new, real jobs for young people. It would be a stop-gap measure, designed to induce employers to take on new staff at a reduced rate for one year—and then what? People would be forced on to the dole. It is an example of Labour short-termism. I doubt that young people would see a penny of the proceeds of the windfall tax, as the Labour party has a list of IOUs and spending pledges totalling about £30 billion. The windfall tax would be rather like a rubber band: stretching three times around the world in order to support alleged Labour causes.

What about jobs, which are crucial when we consider further education? Centrally run, Government-sponsored schemes do not create work, as jobs cannot be sustained

when the schemes have ended. Young people would be back where they started. Labour's Target 2000 is a sham: it would impose an extra tax on businesses, which they can ill afford to pay, with compulsory contributions to training. We should focus on creating a vibrant economy that provides the means and the wealth for employers to take on new staff, especially educated and highly skilled young people. Young people's employment chances would be destroyed by Labour's plans to sign up to the social chapter and the minimum wage.

Ms Walley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Many Labour Members wish to speak about the issue of further education, and I wonder whether the hon. Lady's remarks are in order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): It is a wide subject and, if I thought that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) was out of order, I would rule accordingly. However, I take the point that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

Lady Olga Maitland: As I was saying, in a sober moment many Labour Members recognise that signing the social chapter would be a disaster for young people. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has admitted that such measures would cause a

"shakeout of jobs. Any fool can see that".

If we have any doubts, we should cast an eye on the countries of mainland Europe. Punitive taxation and burdens on employers mean that they cannot afford to employ young people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is ranging rather wide of the subject. Let us return to further education.

Lady Olga Maitland: With the greatest respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am speaking about further education.

First, we must ensure that young people are able to take advantage of further education; and, secondly, graduates must be able to secure jobs. This country's economy must be structured in such a way as to ensure that their education is not wasted. The two points are related, and we cannot examine them in isolation. I think that the experiences of other European countries are very applicable when we talk about young people. For instance, youth unemployment in Spain is 42 per cent.—those young people are in despair.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Lady is reading from a central office brief. I can see it: it is typed out, and the hon. Lady is simply reading it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) knows full well that it is quite in order to refer to speaking notes. However, I remind the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam that she is getting rather wide of the subject.

Lady Olga Maitland: I want to emphasise how important it is that young people's further education is not dashed by what happens to them afterwards. We do not want them to suffer the plight of their brothers and sisters in Italy, where 33 per cent. of young people are idle, in France, where 29 per cent. are desperate and unemployed, or in Germany, where unemployment overall is now 4.5 million—more than twice the level in the United Kingdom and increasing every day, further dashing young people's chances.

Job creation comes not from artificially induced, centrally created Government schemes, but from healthy, innovative economies free to operate in a climate that actively encourages development. It is hardly surprising that we are known as the enterprise centre of Europe.

Further education is a laudable aim. We must continue to invest in education, training and skills, but alone that cannot provide jobs. It merely allows young people to compete effectively in an increasingly tough market. We must ensure that young people get the rich rewards for which they have worked so hard throughout their schooling, their days at further education college and then at university. We have an obligation to ensure that they enter a financially sound world that can create and sustain real jobs, so that young people will be able to achieve their true potential on the basis of their earlier education.

10.10 am

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The speech that we have just heard scores one out of 10 for content. It was pathetic and ill informed. I shall address the subject on the Order Paper: the crisis in further education.

In my constituency, Nelson and Colne college is consulting on making 37 lecturers redundant and not filling 10 vacancies. There is a deep crisis in my local college, which is not some hick institution—it has a marvellous reputation. It achieved Investors in People status, and was the first in Lancashire to do so. In 1993, it was one of only three further education colleges to achieve the charter mark; the Prime Minister recognised that Nelson and Colne college was a fine institution.

The college was inspected by the Further Education Funding Council five months ago, in August 1996. The inspectors stated:

"Nelson and Colne College is a successful tertiary college in East Lancashire. . . Governance and management are strong. Staff are well qualified. . . Standards of teaching are generally high. Students work hard and make sound progress. Examination results are good."

In governance and management, the college rated grade 2, which is defined as

"provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses".

That is the background—a successful college whose board decided on 20 January to plunge it and the wider community into turmoil by announcing all those redundancies. I immediately contacted the college principal, Kath Belton, and had a meeting with her and her senior management. I asked why the decision had been taken. She replied that the college had to save £400,000. It had been operating a deficit, but that is no different from other colleges.

I consulted the annual report of the Further Education Funding Council, which was published only last month. It stated:

"The annual deficit incurred by the sector rose from £10m in 1993/4 to £101m in 1994/5 and stood at an estimated £119m in 1995/6."

The FEFC went on to say:

"A deficit of this order cannot be sustained for more than a few years."

[Mr. Gordon Prentice]

I want the Minister to comment on that when he winds up.

When I saw the principal at the end of January, I asked whether the FEFC had been consulted about the redundancies. To my astonishment, she said that it had not, and that the decision had been taken by the board. I am not entirely sure whether all members of the board knew the reasons behind the decision that they were invited to take on 20 January.

I suggested to Kath Belton and her senior managers, from a layperson's perspective, that getting rid of 37 lecturers and not filling 10 vacancies would have a devastating impact on the scope and quality of the education on offer. I could have been knocked down with a feather when she said that she did not think that the quality and scope of education provision would suffer.

I do not believe that, and people in my constituency and further afield do not believe it. The principal is making the best of a bad job. She has been put in an impossible position by the board's decision of 20 January, but it is incredible that a college could lose so many talented staff and continue to provide a high-quality education for the young people of my area. I do not believe it.

I raised the matter with the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who told me at the beginning of this month, in typical Pontius Pilate fashion:

"It is for colleges in the further education sector such as Nelson and Colne college to manage their resources, including staff, as they see fit in the light of changing needs and circumstances."

I wrote to Professor Melville, the chief executive of the FEFC, expecting that he would have something to say about the matter. He replied:

"Individual college corporations must consider how they will best meet required efficiency gains. . . The Council—

the FEFC—

"does not have a specific role in advising colleges on their management processes."

The Minister has no responsibility, the FEFC has no responsibility, so my college is left twisting in the wind.

I have read all the relevant documents from cover to cover—the National Audit Office report and the purple report from the FEFC. On page 94 of its annual report, the FEFC states that, as a priority, it monitors

"the financial health of the sector and of individual colleges"

and advises

"colleges on their financial planning and financial control systems".

It did not advise Nelson and Colne college. There has been no contact at all.

I shall be brief, as I know that many of my colleagues want to speak in this important debate. I asked the Minister what steps the Department would take

"to assist further education colleges running operating deficits"—

there are well over 200 such colleges around the country—

"to restore their financial health without jeopardising the quality and scope of the education offered".

Only yesterday the Minister replied:

"Colleges are independent, autonomous bodies and are responsible for managing their own financial affairs. The Further Education Funding Council has effective arrangements in place for identifying colleges in financial difficulty and for working with them to recover their financial health."—[*Official Report*, 18 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. *455*.]

That is what the Minister told me yesterday; it is moonshine.

This is not an academic debate—*[Interruption]*—nor is it a matter for levity. Nelson and Colne college is an excellent college. It has a charter mark and is central to the local community. All those who should be able to help my college have washed their hands of it. Unless something happens, and happens soon, my college will be devastated by the loss of all those skilled lecturers. I hope that, even at the eleventh hour, the Minister will be persuaded to intervene and save education in my constituency.

10.19 am

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I apologise for the fact that I shall not be able to stay for the winding-up speeches. I am serving on not one Committee but two, at 10.30 am. I shall have to read the golden words of my hon. Friend the Minister in *Hansard*. I shall try to be brief, as many other hon. Members wish to speak.

Further education is very important to my constituents, as it is the only source of sixth-form education in Harrow. Harrow has three tertiary colleges and a sixth-form college, which is part of the FE sector.

I want to draw attention to the problems of St. Dominic's sixth-form college in Harrow-on-the-Hill, a remarkable college with a fine reputation. I am not exaggerating when I say that an enormous number of parents, whether they are Catholic or not—whether, indeed, they are Christian or not—want to send their children to St. Dominic's because they want them to receive sixth-form education rather than the education provided by the tertiary colleges in the rest of Harrow. St. Dominic's is very popular, and so it should be, given the quality of its teaching and pastoral care and the results that it achieves.

The college is uniquely placed. Being in Harrow-on-the-Hill, it is at the junction of the boroughs of Harrow, Ealing and Brent, and therefore draws people from quite a wide area. It is on a restricted site and needs to expand, but it is difficult for it to extend its existing buildings and increase student numbers, because local residents are worried about what that would mean in traffic terms, and about the domination of the expanded buildings. All that is understandable. The college had the option of buying an adjacent building on the main road, which would have enabled it to expand while taking traffic away from residential areas but, regrettably, that is no longer possible.

Along with the principal of St. Dominic's, Mr. John Lipscomb, I have corresponded with my hon. Friend the Minister, and we are grateful for the careful and concerned way in which he has examined the problems of the college. I feel, however, that there is a flaw in the legislation that established the otherwise tremendously successful FE sector.

When St. Dominic's and one or two other voluntary-aided colleges—of which there are a relatively small number—sought to expand, they were unable to borrow money on the strength of their existing buildings

because it was not entirely clear who owned them. St. Dominic's did not own its buildings, they had never been owned by the local authority, and it turned out that the Catholic Education Service did not own them either. Getting together the money for expansion proved to be a real problem.

The Further Education Funding Council, at least in the London region, was not as helpful as it might have been. I think that it could have sorted the matter out, but suggesting that, if the present site is too restricted, the college should find another site makes no sense in north-west London. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) laughs, but he knows how restricted space is in east London, and the situation is just as bad in north-west London. It simply was not possible to find another suitable site.

Catholic sixth-form education is highly prized in my constituency, and in surrounding constituencies. The present site is terrific for St. Dominic's, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look re-examine the legislation and the activities of the Further Education Funding Council in order to ensure that that college, and the small number of other voluntary-aided colleges elsewhere in the country, can continue to be successful. Catholic sixth-form education would be gravely missed by many people.

One of the reasons Labour will lose the next general election is that Labour Members always describe any set of problems—and of course there are problems, some of which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice)—as a crisis. They hope that, by doing so, they will gain some kudos among those who care about these matters, including those in the FE sector. They hope that people will say, "Whatever the present Government may be doing, at least we could rely on the Labour party."

It is not surprising that the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) got so ratty when I merely asked him how much money an incoming Labour Government would give the FE sector. That is the point: as the hon. Gentleman was saying that more money was needed, mine was not an unreasonable question—or, as he put it, a stupid question. It was all laid out by the FE sector in its submission to the public expenditure survey in April 1996. It stated how much money it wanted. The question is simple: how much would an incoming Labour Government provide?

I think that the answer is this: either a Labour Government would provide money, which would mean that, once again, Labour was being financially imprudent and its much-vaunted views on taxation would be proved to be so much moonshine; or it would not provide the money, in which case the rest of the speech of the hon. Member for Hyndburn goes down the drain. If Labour is not going to provide that extra money, there is plainly no point in the hon. Gentleman's making the complaints that he has made.

The further education sector is tremendously successful. Hon. Members scoffed at my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) when she spoke of the number of people in further education. I am getting nasty looks from the Whip, so I shall be as brief as I can be—rather briefer than one or two Opposition Members.

As I was saying, Opposition Members scoffed at my hon. Friend, and said that she must have obtained her figures from a Conservative central office brief. I do not know whether that is true, but the figures are confirmed in the submission from the further education colleges. Whether it was a central office brief or not, my hon. Friend was right, and those who scoffed were plainly wrong.

We are talking about a £3 billion operation which is highly successful, and has expanded tremendously since it was freed from the shackles of local government. All that we hear from Opposition Members are complaints. Of course there will be problems: that is inevitable when we are making massive changes in the sector, and trying to adapt it not just to increased pupil numbers but to a changing society and a new role. The Government are coping with those problems, however, and only this Government will keep those colleges free.

The hon. Member for Hyndburn made one prophetic observation. He spoke of the democratisation of the FE sector. That can mean only one thing. A Labour Government would return the colleges to the shackles of local authorities; they would bring in the councillors and the bureaucracy, exclude the business men and take the colleges out of the real world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam pointed out, the Labour party must deal with one point before the election. If it has the opportunity to impose a teenage tax, it knows, we know and our constituents know that many people will not be able to go to further education colleges.

FE colleges are a success story. They are expanding, improving and doing terrific work—but all the Labour party can do is sneer at the people who are doing that work.

10.29 am

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) on securing this debate.

The Government's ability to shoot themselves in the foot really does beggar belief. They have a success story for which they should be able to claim some credit. In practice, however, in the past few weeks alone they seem to have managed to alienate the principals of almost every further education college in the country. There was the announcement from the Further Education Funding Council, following receipt of communication from the Department for Education and Employment, that, from the beginning of 1997, funding for demand-led student enrolments was to be withdrawn just over a third of the way through the academic year. Just a couple of weeks later, that decision was turned around and the cut will not be made; the pain is simply being transferred to next year.

Colleges were left uncertain, and, naturally, all the people involved in their administration now feel mistrustful. They feel that the Government have not only broken their trust with them but proved themselves to be incompetent. In many ways that is a shame, because the Government's record is good. Even the hon. Member for Hyndburn said that the number of students at further education colleges had increased by 100 per cent. since 1990.

Although credit should be given where it is due, the Labour party has nothing to offer on this subject. As the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) said, the Labour party is pledging nothing for increased funding. Labour Members bleat about the crisis in further

[Mr. Chris Davies]

education. They wear their bleeding hearts and shed their crocodile tears, but Labour is not promising any additional finance to support further education in years to come.

The increase in student numbers has been achieved not simply through additional funding over the past years but through efficiency improvements made by the colleges themselves—11 per cent. only last year. In the academic year 1997-98, funding is expected to be some £40 million less than that expected two years ago. Less and less money is being provided per further education student.

I hope that the Government will recognise that all hon. Members want efficiency and the most efficient and effective use of money, but there is a danger that, far from following the philosophy of getting a quart out of a pint pot, the Government may risk spoiling the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar. The growth in student numbers over the past few years, although commendable, is still a great deal less than colleges want, and less than they have sought in their strategic plans.

Mr. Sheerman: In my constituency, we have three excellent FE colleges with a first-class reputation. The problem, as the hon. Gentleman and the Minister know, is that efficiency savings can be achieved for a certain period, but there is a critical point at which those savings affect quality. That is happening in higher education. It will now happen in further education. The crucial point is that efficiency savings can be made only for so long, and then quality starts to decline fast.

Mr. Davies: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman.

The Liberal Democrats have made it clear that we want more investment in education. I shall not go into the details at length today, but they involve the need to fund education out of general taxation. We seek a new levy on companies—a remissible training levy—to ensure that more money is put back into higher and further education. We also want to change the funding of students, particularly degree students in higher education, to make more money available to enable an expansion of student numbers.

Mr. Pope: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that the Liberal Democrats would increase taxation. That must be the fabled 1p on income tax to fund education, which is supposed to provide a nursery place for every three and four-year-old, to reduce class sizes, and to clear up the backlog in school repairs. He now suggests that it will fund further education as well. It must be the biggest penny in the world.

Mr. Davies: When I voted last year and the year before against the cut in income tax, the hon. Member for Hyndburn was out in the Corridor having a smoke. I recognise the point that he makes. It is quite true that our pledge to increase taxation by 1p in the pound to invest in education is geared primarily towards education at the lower end, but some £600 million of the money that we would seek to raise would go into further higher education. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's point—and rather more effectively than he dealt with a point raised by the hon. Member for Harrow, West.

Oldham sixth form college, which was established just a few years ago, has proved itself a great success in raising the staying-on rate of students and pupils throughout the borough. The half dozen or so representatives of my party who were on the council when the college was established had doubts about whether it was advisable to set it up and abolish all the school sixth forms at the same time.

Oldham sixth form college's success over the years has shown that those doubts were unfounded. The greater staying-on rates that have been achieved have been worth the sacrifice of school sixth forms. Raising the standard of education in boroughs such as Oldham—a borough that traditionally had low educational achievement—is crucial to the regeneration of industrial towns such as the one I represent.

According to the principal, Oldham sixth form college turned away 150 applicants last year, although they were quite capable of taking on the courses—and the number who will be turned away will probably increase because of the cuts that are likely to be made next year. It is likely that 200 or more people will be turned away next year. There is a great demand for places, but there is a danger that young people will miss out because opportunities will no longer be available to them. There is also a danger that they will not be able to take advantage of the education opportunities that should be available to every citizen.

Mr. Tipping: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that disadvantage and staying-on rates should be included as parameters for a new funding mechanism, which we must have next year, for places such as Oldham and for coalfield communities? Places that have an education deficit should get priority.

Mr. Davies: I agree. One of the priorities—I hope that the Minister will address this—should be targeting in college funding. There must be a difference between northern boroughs, coalfield communities and the like, where educational achievement has traditionally been low, and counties such as Surrey and Sussex, where the state of affairs is very different.

What colleges need above all is stability. They need clear plans for the medium and long term so that they can prepare their strategies for the future. If they are to achieve efficiency savings, it is necessary for them to have a clear idea of what funding they will have so that they can plan. I am tired of principals telling me, "We simply don't know where we are."

Secondly, the level of funding needs to be addressed. I have already touched on that. Thirdly, there is a need for targeting funding on colleges in less affluent parts of the country. Fourthly, there is a need for urgency in the process, especially as colleges are trying to plan for next year. At the moment, the FEFC is examining options for next year. That examination must be completed quickly so that principals can make their plans for next year as soon as possible.

Further education has been a success over the past few years. It is a success now. It is very important that steps are taken to ensure that it continue to be a success in the years to come.

10.38 am

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): We have had a most interesting debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) on initiating it, and on speaking so incisively about the issues facing the education sector.

The hon. Members for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) seemed to deny that there has been a crisis in further education, but this debate is taking place precisely because of the crisis for which the Minister is significantly responsible and which has occasioned deep demoralisation across further education. That is why I—exceptionally for a Front Bencher—tabled an early-day motion, which was signed by 100 hon. Members and which sought to call attention to the problems facing colleges in their constituencies. My hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Hyndburn reflected on the particular problems of colleges in their constituencies. Reference was also made to acute problems in Stoke-on-Trent and in a number of other colleges.

We should dispense with the absurdity of Conservative Members who say that we should account for how we would pay for the crisis. The Government said last November that it was time Labour identified how it would fund certain parts of the education budget, but at that time we knew nothing about the funding shortfall that has led to the recent crisis. As late as January, the Secretary of State said that all was well.

The further education sector told the Minister that there was a shortfall of £80 million on previous years, and that a bill of £80 million was building up for students taking courses in the current year. The simple fact is that the Department should put its own house in order, and the Minister should get a grip on the crisis that has developed in colleges. The further education sector is crucial to education and training for the nation.

Let us get the figures clear. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam has great difficulty differentiating between universities and further education colleges: the subject of the debate is further education. Her figures are incorrect, because there are 3.5 million students in further education, which is more than there are in school sixth forms and universities combined. That is why the sector is so important. It deals with the skills, competences and educational opportunities of which the country is most in need. It provides the platform from which people can move on to higher education, and can equip themselves for jobs in a world in which additional skills are required.

The naivety of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) is at times matched only by his honesty. His party had reservations about the hugely successful Oldham sixth form college in my constituency, to which I pay tribute for its successes in recent years. His naivety was adequately exposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn. We are told that the 1p on income tax for education will cover every element of the education budget, which runs into billions of pounds, thus producing a penny that magnifies into astronomical figures. We do not expect the Liberal Democrats to be particularly strong on mathematics. However, we expect the Minister to answer the charge that we have made today.

Mr. Chris Davies: Did the hon. Gentleman not hear my response to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope)? I pointed out that £600 million of that money would be geared to further and higher education.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman will have great difficulty making his sums add up. Every time the Liberal Democrats speak on education, the sector on which they speak attracts resources based on the 1p increase in income tax.

I want the Minister to deal with the obvious point that is being made in the House today, which has been made in the many letters that we have all received from across the country, about the crisis facing individual colleges because of the Government's original indication that they were not prepared to fund the demand-led element. That crisis sent alarm bells ringing. It demoralised the sector, and its implications and consequences for colleges are profound.

I suppose that the Minister at least deserves congratulations, because he has succeeded in putting further education on the map. The silent service has suddenly become an extremely noisy advocate of the role it plays, and not before time. What a pity that it has had to do that because of the crisis that has emerged. We welcome the fact that, after pressure was put on the Government, a rapid U-turn took place. It was decided that it was scarcely reasonable to tell colleges that they could not be funded for students who were already enrolled and were taking courses.

I always think that it is best to move away from discussing areas of public service if I want to engage the full sympathies of Conservative Members. I emphasise, therefore, that many private providers of training that are linked to colleges would have faced bankruptcy and worse if the Government had seen through the original absurd proposition not to fund the demand-led element. However, that crisis persists. The Government have announced that they do not intend to make those funds available next year.

The Minister must surely realise that colleges are already committed to a certain number of students who are taking courses. He should also realise that colleges have been thrust into this position. They were told in February this year that the crucial engine of expansion on which they have been dependent for the past three years will not obtain next year. Significant areas of expansion have led to increased opportunities for students in their communities. Colleges already have commitments and plans for next year, which they are expected to honour until this extraordinary act by the Government intervened. The Minister has pulled the rug from under them at this late stage, which has created chaos.

Mr. Timms: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has drawn attention to this important matter. In Newham and similar areas, college expansions have been funded by regeneration grants from Europe, city challenge and elsewhere, and have been tied to funding for increased student places. If funding is no longer available for such expansion, the danger is that they will have to repay those regeneration grants.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing out that issue, which seriously affects a number of colleges. I hope that the Minister will also deal with that matter.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): I shall, if the hon. Gentleman sits down.

Mr. Davies: Indeed. I recognise the constraints on time, and I shall give the Minister the chance to respond to these points.

[Mr. Davies]

The Labour party emphasises the significance of the further education sector. Two specific aspects of our policy will be of enormous support to the sector. First, our new deal sets out how we intend to fund, from windfall taxation of the utilities, jobs and training places for 250,000 unemployed people. Secondly, contrary to the mistaken impression that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam sought to create, our proposals for education attendance allowances—transferring child benefit to education attendance—will support students at the place where they enjoy their education. That is our priority. I expect the Minister to tell us that the Government have learnt some lessons from this sorry affair.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): As always, the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) omitted the crucial points. First, he omitted to tell us whether a Labour Government would reintroduce the non-cash-limited element of demand-led funding, which has been the centrepiece of this debate. The matter is about not cost but the principle of whether Labour would reintroduce it. Secondly, he reiterated the absurdity of the windfall tax apparently abolishing youth unemployment—a one-off measure paid for by a one-off tax.

It is nearly four years since further education and sixth form colleges left local authority control and were freed to become incorporated organisations. Their achievements have been formidable. Several hon. Members have described the exceptional growth, of which there is no doubt. Student numbers have grown by more than 30 per cent.

In opening the debate, the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) referred to staff contracts and issues relating to the employment of staff, demonstrating that he seems more concerned about the numbers of staff than the students who are being taught. The staff "silver book" contract under which virtually all staff were employed at the time of incorporation—too many are still employed under it—stipulates a maximum of 21 hours a week teaching and 38 weeks' total work a year. I do not think that, in the last part of this century, such contracts can ensure that colleges efficiently use the staff they need.

Mr. Pope *rose—*

Mr. Paice: I cannot give way. I do not have time, because so many hon. Members spoke in the debate.

Since incorporation, the Government have increased resources to the further education sector, which now receives well over £3 billion a year. The sector will have noticed that, despite all their huffing and puffing today, the Opposition said nothing about providing any further direct funding.

The House may be aware that yesterday the Further Education Funding Council published a comprehensive set of performance indicators for the 1994-95 academic year, which has been placed in the Library. It contains a vast amount of information of both local and national application. It shows that the average achievement rate for students who completed their programmes was 71 per cent., which I am sure most colleagues would agree is not too bad.

If one unpacks that figure, however, one finds a massive variation in colleges. Although part of the variation can be explained by circumstances, colleges with the lowest rates of achievement should at least be giving as much attention to raising them as they are to securing further increases in student numbers. To put that into perspective, the worst achievement rates in the general FE sector are considerably below 30 per cent., whereas the best are over 90 per cent.

I turn to the issue of demand-led expansion funding and the events of recent weeks. It is correct that, in the 1991 White Paper the Government undertook to meet the additional costs of colleges' expansion above agreed targets, which became known as "super-DLE" payments. No Opposition Member has said that, until the current financial year, those payments have never been called on because the costs of the demand-led element have been met by the shortfall in performance of other colleges, such that the overall FEFC budget has been sufficient to meet the total costs.

The unforeseen and unprecedented expansion in student numbers in the 1995-96 academic year changed that. Student numbers in full-time equivalents rose by 11 per cent. and, in that total, the number of FEFC-funded part-time students rose by no less than 37 per cent. Although the rate of full-time equivalent student growth has slowed a little, it is still forecast to be about 8 per cent.

The Further Education Funding Council wrote to the Government on 30 November, after the conclusion of the public expenditure round, to say that its demand for DLE payments would be £82 million in the current financial year. A few weeks later, we were advised that the additional costs in the next financial year to meet the growth above target in the spring and summer terms of this academic year would be another £84 million. So, in the space of six or seven weeks, we were told that DLE would require over two years at least £166 million—excluding the rest of the next academic year. Those are substantial sums to find, but, according to our undertaking, we found the £82 million shortfall for the current financial year from other departmental spending.

A Government decision not to pay the £84 million for the first two terms of the next financial year—the last two terms of the current academic year—was never made. It was extremely unfortunate that the colleges were led to believe by a letter from the Further Education Funding Council that that might be so. The Government never took such a decision, and have therefore not changed their position. When we were able to look more carefully at the figures and examine the matter, I was able to announce, as hon. Members have said, that we shall ensure that that £84 million is met. It is due to colleges, it is being incurred with students in place, it will be met, and the Government will meet the greater part of it.

I know that a number of colleges are concerned about what can be described as borderline cases—precisely, whether a contract was in existence and arrangements were made. I know that the FEFC is consulting colleges on the issues, and I understand that it is sending a letter today to all colleges to try to ensure that the precise details are clear. I should make it absolutely clear that students who are already engaged on a course should have nothing whatever to worry about. There is no question, as has been suggested, of stopping students who are engaged in courses.

On a reasonable basis, we have met our obligations under the White Paper commitment. In the space of six weeks, we found an extra £150 million or so to honour our undertaking. That is a lot of money to find. I must tell Opposition Members that, even if funds are not cash limited, as those were not, they still have to be provided for in public expenditure plans within reasonable parameters of expectation. The sums that I have described could not by any means have been considered a reasonable expectation. We acted promptly to deal with the immediate issues, but rightly must also look at the future.

We are examining urgently with the FEFC measures to improve forecasting to ensure that such a problem does not arise again. Clearly, we did not have sufficient timely and precise signals. I said in my announcement on 5 February that we look to the council to meet all its future expenditure for the next academic year from its voted provision, which is in itself intended to provide for continued growth. I have also asked the FEFC to review the options open to it for the 1997-98 academic year in the light of my announcement and in consultation with colleges. I understand that it will be sending out a document shortly.

One particular issue that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have identified for urgent review is the practice of franchising by some FE colleges. The facts are quite striking. About a tenth of FE full-time equivalent students are in off-site franchised provision, and nearly three quarters of last year's unprecedented growth was due to franchising. I want to make it clear that I am not opposed in principle to franchising; it covers a wide range of courses and activities. Indeed, in my constituency, some excellent work is done where schools franchise from the local FE college. Franchising is, however, a matter of some controversy in the sector.

In its report on the FEFC a fortnight ago, the National Audit Office acknowledged the merits of franchising, but pointed out risks to the quality of provision and of the substitution of public funds for existing expenditure and training. The House will know that I have asked a working party to look into franchising urgently.

Two other issues have been raised, which I shall try to deal with quickly. The first is overall funding. As I have said, the Government have increased funding for the further education sector year on year. We have built in efficiency savings, but I remind the House that the National Audit Office report identified management as a key factor in financial health. The report makes it clear that poor financial health does not appear to depend on any sector-wide factors.

The other issue that has been raised is teachers' retirement. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will lay regulations before the House in one minute. There was no announcement on the radio this morning. I understand that there was a union representative. The regulations will defer the implementation of the proposals until 1 September, and will defer the reduction in the employer's contribution rate to 1 July.

Revenue Support Grant (Suffolk)

11 am

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): Four Suffolk Members of Parliament applied to introduce this important debate. On behalf of all of us, I express my gratitude to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing the debate to be initiated. Around me are my hon. Friends the Members for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) for Central Suffolk (Mr. Lord) and for Waveney (Mr. Porter). I particularly welcome the Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who will reply to the debate.

In the past 20 years, Suffolk has changed more than most counties, helped by increased trade with the continent of Europe. The population has grown appreciably, and so has the county's accessibility and prosperity. There has been a long-standing willingness for individuals of different political persuasions in local government to work together. The people of Suffolk have every expectation and every right to demand that their parliamentary and local government representatives work together on issues of importance to the county.

That viewpoint held sway until May 1993, when a Labour administration, with Liberal Democrat help, took control of county hall. Since then, the council has not only been the most incompetently led in the history of Suffolk, but has had as its hallmarks distortion, propaganda and arrogance, which have brought shame to the good name of Suffolk and have regrettably turned the administration into a laughing stock in Westminster and Whitehall.

I shall give the House a flavour of that by quoting an exchange of correspondence that I had with the leader of the council, Chris Mole. In a parliamentary written answer of 21 February 1995, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire), on behalf of the Department for Education, said that local education authority expenditure on administration in Suffolk was 5 per cent., compared with a national figure of 4.5 per cent. The figure was well above that of any of the surrounding counties: 4.2 per cent. for Norfolk; 3.9 per cent. for Essex; and 3.7 per cent. for Cambridgeshire.

When challenged on that, Councillor Mole aggressively informed me that I was wrong and that, in my figure, I had included the cost of inspectors, education welfare officers, educational psychologists, special needs staff and many others. However, my view was confirmed by my hon. Friend the Minister in a letter on 19 April 1995. Sadly, but typically, no comment or apology was received from Councillor Mole.

Councillor Mole wrote to me:

"Dear Mr. Spring

Your incredulity at my factual responses to your misleading electioneering is only matched by my concern at your ignorance of the work of Suffolk County Council."

He helpfully continued:

"You may not have bothered to check your source, or you may believe that those staff fall into your pejorative definition of 'bureaucrats'."

He was, of course, wrong. The mind-boggling arrogance of the council leader was brought out when he further wrote:

"Your reference to reductions in 'educational bureaucracy' making up for the shortfall in school's reserves reveals such a gross misunderstanding of the local management and financing of schools that I would prefer to assist you with a personal tutorial".

[Mr. Richard Spring]

That offensive offer was the nearest we have come to a serious offer from the county council of dialogue on financing or other matters.

The blunt truth is that the incoming Labour-Liberal administration made a clear, cynical decision to cut off all constructive contact with Suffolk's Conservative Members of Parliament and to use taxpayers' money to pursue, with an avalanche of press releases, a wholly unjustified vendetta against central Government and Suffolk's parliamentary representatives. The past four years have been a disgrace and a parody of fair and effective local government. By deliberate intent, fear and alarm has been spread among the residents of our county.

What are the facts? Has Suffolk been starved of Government resources? Has Suffolk been shortchanged by the taxpayer? Has the revenue support grant been cut? Not at all. As the House of Commons Library has confirmed, since 1992–93, Suffolk's overall standard spending assessment has risen by 11.7 per cent.—one third higher than the national figure.

I fully accept that local government, like central Government, has been required to show restraint. We cannot bequeath to our children an unsustainable debt burden. One has only to look across the channel to see what is happening to economies and employment prospects there. However, that is no basis for the propaganda outpourings from county hall and the distortions in the revenue support grant.

I shall give the House a flavour of what I mean. A banner headline in the Ipswich *Evening Star* of 25 January 1995 read, "Cuts Cuts Cuts". The article began:

"Hundreds of jobs throughout Suffolk are under threat as officials struggle to come to terms with Government cash cuts."

On 10 February, the *Evening Star* reported Councillor Duncan Macpherson, chairman of the county council education committee, speaking of teaching job losses, bigger class sizes and woefully inadequate money from central Government. That was a foretaste of what was to come.

On 14 February, a headline elsewhere read "Time to strike back at cuts". The article said:

"and what it means is that many of our most important services could be pared to the bone in 1995."

On 22 February, we had a headline "Jobs at risk as cuts bite", with Councillor Chris Mole talking about

"the comprehensive emasculation of local authorities inflicted by the Tories"

and alleging that 110 teachers' jobs were to go. None of that was worth the paper that it was written on.

The council produced a so-called information document entitled, "The Government's Funding Failure: Suffolk Schools and Suffolk Children. Their Bleak Future". It catalogued a sort of educational Armageddon, concluding with the sentence:

"A good education is at risk."

Never mind that, in every year since 1979, schools' budgets have grown in real terms. Do not let the truth get in the way of the argument.

I shall not disguise the real anxieties of parents, teachers and governors in response to this. We have all had constituents in our surgeries in a state of shock, fearing—as was the intention—that schools would close, teachers would be sacked and their children's education would suffer as services in the county imploded. The propaganda barrage continued unabated throughout the year.

What happened in practice? In the local government settlement of 1995–96, the county council received no cut in resourcing, but an increase of 3.5 per cent. Most crucially, however, the education SSA for 1995–96 was upped by 5.7 per cent.—£11.7 million. That was two and a half times the rate of inflation and nearly 20 per cent. more than the average SSA increase for English county councils.

I fully accept that, historically, Suffolk county council has spent above its education SSA. However, it is incomprehensible that the council spent only £8 million of the £11 million increase in its 1995–96 settlement. It chose to spend the money elsewhere. No proper or rational explanation has been forthcoming for that decision. As we have discovered, no matter what taxpayer-supported settlement is provided for Suffolk, it is branded as "inadequate". That has become a mantra.

By September 1996, the flagrantly disingenuous county council was at it again. Headlines screamed about cuts of £18 million. Shockingly, the county council invited school head teachers to prepare for a 5 per cent. cut in their budgets. Understandably, they were aghast. In west Suffolk, 134 teachers and head teachers publicly sent a fax of protest to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The accompanying newspaper headlines were cataclysmic. Hook, line and sinker, the stream of misinformation had been taken on board.

My hon. Friends and I repeatedly asked how the council had reached the figure of £18 million. We pressed for information, but not one shred of concrete evidence was produced. The figure was a total travesty. With exactly the same information, no other county council had been reckless enough to make such ludicrous projections.

Inevitably, bad news grabs the headlines. The barrage of mendacity continued, as reflected in the headline in the *East Anglian Daily Times* of 7 November 1996— "Tax warning on education cash".

The county council was spreading fear like a forest fire. Later in November, we had the local government settlement. Did we get £18 million worth of cuts? Surprise, surprise, we did not. We saw an increased settlement of just under £10 million. What happened to the projected education cut of £10.9 million? The education SSA was increased by 4.2 per cent., or nearly £9 million.

How many trees were uselessly felled? How much airtime was wasted by the county council? Its shroud waving was once again been exposed for all to see. As the *East Anglian Daily Times* summed up in its leader on 28 November 1996:

"Suffolk appears to have been one of the very few councils to have jumped in with both feet and prematurely warned of cuts in jobs and services on the basis of what seems to have been pure guesswork from preliminary figures being bandied around in Whitehall."

The editorial concluded:

"Politics can be a messy business. If this time next year there is still a Labour/Liberal Democrat controlled Suffolk County Council and a Tory Government, the Council Leaders would do well not to cry wolf for a third time. The public and their own staff will not stand for it again."

What has the county council done with the increased education SSA of £9 million? The shocking truth is that the council has decided to spend only £5 million. In addition to the £11 million in school reserves, the general LEA reserve fund is estimated at £5 million from 1 April 1997. There is also approximately £2 million of earmarked balances. Some £5 million that the Government intended for education in Suffolk has not been spent to that purpose.

As the chairman of the council's education committee has confirmed to me, whatever the SSA is, he and his council are so party politically prejudiced that they would describe it as totally inadequate. That is despite the fact that his party has explicitly accepted our levels of departmental spending within the overall Government control total, and no more is on offer. What a compliment to the Chancellor's good housekeeping.

During the past few appalling years of constant griping about funding, we have all been implicitly expected to hark back to some golden era of education in Suffolk. The truth could not be more different. In 1979, under Labour, the Suffolk pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools was 1:23.7—it is now 1:21.7. Similarly, the pupil-teacher ratio for secondary schools has improved from 1:18.1 to 1:16.4. The dramatic improvement in funding for education in Suffolk is fully illustrated by the rise in spending by two thirds per pupil, at both primary and secondary level, in real terms since the last Labour Government. That has been a huge commitment to our county by the taxpayer.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of education, will he consider the damage that has been done to parents' confidence in schools by the county council campaign? In my constituency, parents have received threatening letters from the LEA that say that, unless their children take their nursery vouchers to local authority schools, they will not be guaranteed places in the primary schools of their choice. Is that not another example of what my hon. Friend is talking about?

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that valid point, and I hope to elaborate on it when I reach the subject of the handling of nursery vouchers by the county council. He is right to say that the fear and anxiety aroused by the council about nursery vouchers has undermined parents' confidence in the education of their children. That is an absolute disgrace.

One of the county council's most bizarre extravagances is its anti-poverty strategy. All my right hon. and hon. Friends in Suffolk, including myself, have done voluntary work and are completely committed to helping those in genuine need. If that is what the council's anti-poverty strategy is about, we would applaud it. It is not. It is a wheeze to spend taxpayers' money to curry electoral favour with certain groups and to create a new bureaucratic empire.

Suffolk's unemployment level is 5.4 per cent. That is below the national average, and less then half the European Union average. It is one of the lowest anywhere in the industrialised world. Such has been the pace of job creation in Suffolk in the past four years that we have seen a dramatic fall of 40 per cent. in unemployment. By any proper measurement of need—school meals, income support and other indices of deprivation—Suffolk is a quietly prosperous place. How does the county council define poverty? Incredibly, anybody who lives in a household that has less than half the national average household income is defined as living in poverty. That gives new meaning to the adage that the poor will always be with us. If household incomes were to soar or fall sharply, the number in poverty would change in tandem by that definition. The council does not provide any absolute definition of need or consumption: its definition is useless.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): My hon. Friend is not being entirely fair to Suffolk county council when he says that it has provided no absolute definition of poverty. It has provided a definition of poverty, and two of the criteria were lack of access to piped gas and not being connected to a mains sewer. I have neither of those, so I must be included in the council's definition of poverty.

Mr. Spring: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making that point. He illustrates the fact that the council's definition is based on urban areas. Suffolk is a predominantly rural county, where the county council has not the faintest idea about how thousands of its residents in rural areas live. That sums up the whole urban orientation of that council.

How is the money spent in Suffolk? It is spent on esoteric items such as a low-calorie cookbook and a sewing circle in Ipswich. A council that is supposedly starved of resources somehow spends £60,000 on a bus providing information, not books, on how libraries work, the revenue cost of which is £20,000 per annum. Yet I cannot get a footpath built in a rural village in my constituency, despite the fact that lives are under threat. It is a disgraceful misordering of priorities and the sort of politically correct nonsense characteristic of Labour inner-city authorities. It will change the circumstances of no one in real need but will simply provide a beanfeast for the county council press office and for councillors and officers attending conferences and workshops at taxpayers' expense.

The reason why education and the anti-poverty campaign are interconnected is both noteworthy and disturbing. Parents of young pre-school children in Suffolk may be forgiven for believing that the provision of taxpayer-funded nursery school facilities is based on a reasonably rational basis of need. In Suffolk, it is not. Children get their new nursery school place only if they happen to live in an area where the county council has deemed that such a school is warranted under its anti-poverty strategy.

What would happen if that principle were applied across education in the county? Would a new classroom, a new gymnasium or an extra teacher be made available only if, in its wisdom, the county council decided that socio-economic needs were the prime determinant? That is precisely the mumbo-jumbo that has destroyed the quality of education in places like Islington, Hackney and Lambeth, which drives parents to educate their children in entirely different areas.

We all welcome nursery provision, which the nursery voucher scheme will soon liberate. However, the enormous expansion of nursery schools initiated by Suffolk county council has put unreasonable pressure on

[Mr. Spring]

existing school budgets and the funding of teachers' salaries. Before the last county council elections, the previous council sought to increase the number of new nursery schools by three a year. In the past four years, by contrast, both capital and running costs have soared, with seven new primary units this year.

The council cannot have it both ways. It is unacceptable to decline to spend the additional education SSA increases, yet shout for more; it is only fair to existing schools in Suffolk to have a proper balance in nursery provision. Through their budgets, existing schools are paying for that decision. My hon. Friends and the public will draw their own conclusions as to how the anti-poverty criteria have produced a clearly demonstrable bias in favour of nursery provision being located in Labour-controlled areas of the county.

So here we have it: forecasts of teacher sackings; cuts, cuts, cuts; and a massive increase in council tax. My hon. Friends will know that that particular scaremongering should be seen against a projected increase in Suffolk county council tax of only 4.1 per cent. So much for the gigantic increases in bills, that the county council told us we would face in April.

Mr. Michael Lord (Central Suffolk): My hon. Friend has dealt in detail with how parents and teachers have been frightened by the ridiculous proposition of severe cuts. Is there any evidence that the county council now appreciates that it was wrong? More importantly, has it taken steps to admit, to the people it so frightened, that it was wrong?

Mr. Spring: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point. The best we had was what I imagine passed for an apology from the leader of the council, who said that the £18 million cut scaremongering campaign was a worst-case scenario.

Throughout all those events, something has obviously not been quite right—the propaganda barrage has been so totally over the top. In large measure, it has been about the terrible dissensions within the Labour party at county hall, and the uncritical passivity of the Liberal Democrats. We are witnessing the outbreak of a form of municipal fratricide between the leader of the council and the chairman of the education committee, like two aging comics fighting it out for top billing in the end-of-the-pier show. For what Councillors Mole and Macpherson want is to secure the crown of leading the Labour group after 1 May—some crown, some group! They will clearly do and say anything, no matter how distorted or misleading, to establish their macho credibility, and all of Suffolk pays the price for their mutual animosity and ambition. If the matter were not so serious, it would be laughable.

Suffolk county council has ill served the people of our county. Enough is enough. I hope that it is the final curtain call: goodbye and good riddance.

11.24 am

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker and to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) for arriving late and missing the start of the debate. I did not intend to do so, and no discourtesy was meant.

I shall now tackle the points made by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds. First and crucially, the hon. Gentleman alleged that, under its Labour-Liberal Democrat leadership, Suffolk county council provoked anxieties and fears unnecessarily over the past year or so about the necessity for budget cuts for 1997-98. I should point out that all that the council did, as it has done in previous years and as it did when it was Conservative-controlled before 1994—indeed, as the council has always done since its inception in 1974—was to take the Government's forecast figures in the Red Book and apply them to its finances.

The leader of the council checked with the Secretary of State that the figures were the ones on which any responsible council must base its plans. They showed a 5 per cent. cut in the sum that the county council could spend in the coming year.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cann: No.

During the year, I have protested about those figures, the county council has protested about what those figures mean, and all the committees have examined what a 5 per cent. cut would mean to the services that they deliver. Ultimately—goodness knows why—the Government decided not to continue with the figures that they had originally forecast. It was probably because of the publicity that the county council gave to how the cuts would affect services, because people such as me lobbied heavily in favour of the services in Suffolk, and because organisations, teachers, governors and head teachers throughout Suffolk lobbied and organised—

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cann: No, I shall not give way. I have only about 10 minutes and there is plenty of time for the Secretary of State to do his bit later.

We all fought to ensure that the Government figures would be changed, and they were. The only people in Suffolk who did not fight for Suffolk, for the county council, for the budget and for our services, were the five Conservative Members who represent Suffolk constituencies. The only time that they mention Suffolk is to have a go at Suffolk county council. The Secretary of State can snigger if he wishes; we in Suffolk are used to that.

The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds criticised Suffolk county council for its education service. Is he not aware that Suffolk is one of the few counties—indeed, I suspect, the only county in the country—not to have suffered even one opt-out school? I know that the Secretary of State knows that, because he has protested about it often enough.

Does the hon. Gentleman not know that there are more teachers and fewer administrators in Suffolk schools now than there were when Suffolk was Conservative-controlled in 1993? Clearly not. Is he aware that under local management of schools, Suffolk is one of the highest payers out to schools, because it is one of the authorities that keeps the least money in central education administration? Is he not proud of that record? He should be. Schools, parents and governors trust that council,

which gives out more money to schools than any other authority. Why is the hon. Gentleman not proud of it? Why does he criticise it?

Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that, since 1994, when Labour took control—and the Liberal Democrats, too; I apologise to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) for not mentioning them—the money that the Government give to Suffolk county council has been reduced by 3 per cent. in real terms, whereas between 1990 and 1994, when it was Conservative-controlled, the sum given was increased by 12 per cent.? What a strange set of figures.

Does the hon. Gentleman not know that £39 million, in real terms, has been taken from Suffolk over the past four years? He certainly has not protested about it. Of that sum, £12 million has been made up by efficiency savings within the council, but the rest has had to be found by making economies in its services.

Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that, during that period class sizes have increased in our primary schools, and that elements of the fire service have had to be cut? Was he not here three years ago when I stood in the Chamber arguing about the police budget in Suffolk, and managed to get £3 million put quietly back the following year? He could not even be bothered to turn up, and neither could the Secretary of State.

The hon. Gentleman should be careful what he says about anti-poverty strategies. I know that the Government keep altering the way in which we count unemployment. The last I heard, they had altered it 29 times since 1979—and every time they do, the figure goes down. That is strange enough, but there is one statistic that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds really ought to understand.

I do not know exactly where in Suffolk the hon. Gentleman lives, but in my constituency, and I suspect in those of Conservative Suffolk Members too, one in five households have no income other than benefit. The Government can alter the figures, cheat and make headline announcements about unemployment being 1.8 million, but the fact is that in one in five households of working age in my constituency, nobody has a job.

If people live somewhere nice and leafy in a little village, they can try to pretend that that is not happening, but it is. Fear and anxiety live out there. They are not promoted by the county council; they are out there among our people, along with the lack of a feel-good factor. Over the past 18 years, that is what the Government have reduced this country to: insecurity, anxiety and fear.

That fear is not fear of the county council, of Ipswich council or, I suspect, of the local council in Bury St. Edmunds. Fear and insecurity are promoted by the Government as a matter of policy.

The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds talked about transport. However, the county council's transport strategy was agreed by the Department of Transport, and with the Government office for the eastern region and the transport people in Bedford. The policy being carried out is the policy that the Government told the county council to carry out.

The hon. Gentleman said that Suffolk county council was run by people from urban areas who do not understand rural areas. However, only 16 of about 60 councillors are from Ipswich—and I think that there are four from Bury St. Edmunds. There is a great swathe of people from the constituency of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), although they are usually either Liberal or Labour, because there is hardly a Tory left. They all represent rural seats. Duncan MacPherson represents a rural seat. *[Interruption.]* Well, it is rural to me.

Suffolk is a rural county, so the people elected to the council come predominantly from rural areas. The fact that they are not all Tories now is another matter, and that is what Conservative Members should be concerned about, rather than criticising the council.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to talk about building, I can tell him that two nurseries are being built in Ipswich, one for the Britannia area and one for Sprites. Those nurseries are badly needed, and they will open in September. Well done, Suffolk county council. I have long held the view that the rural areas of Suffolk have been subsidised by the urban areas. Through his activities in the health service, the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds has tried to keep that subsidy going. I do not blame him for favouring his own constituency, but I know what he is up to.

For the first time in its history, Suffolk is now being run in the interests of the whole county, rather than in those of Conservative Members' constituencies. The hon. Gentleman will not know that in my constituency three primary schools that were built in 1935 as 10-year temporary structures are still being used as schools today. That is shameful, and it is one of the problems that the Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled council is trying to put right.

Unfortunately, the Secretary of State—who, as I can see, is not interested in what I am saying—did not feel able to grant our capital challenge bid, which would have enabled the council to go ahead with a new school.

Four hon. Members applied for this Adjournment debate, but it was the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds who was successful. That was right, because he has been the most voluble critic of the county council. Yet he talks to us about dialogue. When Suffolk county council was Tory, I, as the Member for Ipswich, did not criticise the council in the press.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): There was no need to.

Mr. Cann: I did not criticise it because there was dialogue. I went and talked to the council. That does not mean that I talked to the people who chaired the committees, because it was clear that they did what the officers told them to. That was always true of Suffolk under Tory rule. I used to speak to the chief officers, so there was a dialogue and I, as the local Member of Parliament, could get things done in connection with Suffolk county council.

In contrast, for the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, the idea of dialogue is to slag off the county council on the front page of the *East Anglian Daily Times*, and then expect things to change. Is that dialogue? When the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is fired, the hon. Gentleman ought to be promoted into his place, because clearly he has the same diplomatic skills.

Yesterday, the council's transport committee met. It contains Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative members, and one independent from Long Melford. We still have independents in Suffolk. The independent stood

[Mr. Cann]

up and moved a vote of no confidence in the five Tory Members of Parliament for Suffolk. One of the Tories walked out of the room rather than vote against the motion, and the committee passed it by 16 votes to eight. My case rests.

11.39 am

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I listened in vain for any syllable of condemnation, or even of apology, from the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) for the appalling record of Suffolk county council, which my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) outlined. In 15 minutes, the hon. Gentleman demonstrated clearly to the House and, I hope, to the voters of Ipswich, how completely unfit he is to represent those voters here in Parliament.

I dare say that we shall find the same absence of condemnation when the hon. Member for North–West Durham (Ms Armstrong) speaks. I hope that she will clarify Labour's position on spending commitments. We have heard on many occasions from Suffolk county council that it needs to spend more. As far as I could tell from what the hon. Member for Ipswich said, he endorses those claims; but we know from the shadow Chancellor that no more money will be spent next year or the year after in the event that a Labour Government are elected.

I hope that, when the hon. Member for North–West Durham speaks, she will make it clear whether she endorses the view of the Suffolk county council Labour leader or that of the shadow Chancellor. That is a vital question for the House and for the voters of Suffolk, but it is also important in terms of what happens outside Suffolk, because what we have seen in Suffolk in the past four years an example of what Labour administration means in practice. It is not only an example: it is a salutary warning.

The council was elected in 1993, and is therefore what people would describe as a new Labour administration. Like many others, it is a new Labour administration that is slavishly propped up by the Liberal Democrat party. Once again, the Liberal Democrats in Suffolk have demonstrated beyond any possible doubt that a vote for the Liberal Democrat party anywhere in Suffolk has precisely the same effect as a vote for the Labour party—a message that I am sure the voters have taken on board.

I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds on securing the debate, and on his excellent and wide-ranging speech. His speech had only one shortcoming: he dealt far too gently and kindly with Suffolk county council; and his language had that moderation for which he has become famous in the county during the past few months, while he has so effectively exposed exactly what has been happening at county hall.

I entirely endorse everything that my hon. Friend said about education and especially about the appalling way in which Labour and its Liberal Democrat allies have, for entirely party political ends, played on the anxieties and fears of thousands of parents and children, and quite a number of teachers and staff, in my constituency.

I want to touch on three simple themes: first, how new Labour in Suffolk still means the old loony left in practice; secondly, how new Labour in Suffolk equals new sleaze, as the county council ruthlessly deprives rural areas of resources and pours huge subsidies into the Labour urban strongholds; and thirdly, how new Labour in Suffolk equals incompetence on a new and breathtaking scale.

The debate is about the revenue support grant for Suffolk county council. The Labour party's thesis throughout has been that money is tight. Labour would have us believe that teachers' jobs are at risk, that social services for vulnerable families are about to be cut and that the fire service will be virtually closed down.

Against that background of shroud waving and alleged lack of resources, let me ask a few questions. Which council has decided in the past four years to employ a full-time equal opportunities officer? Which council thinks that its staff should have extra time off during working hours to carry out trade union duties? Which council has a full-time Unison trade union official? Which council believes that the best way in which to tackle poverty is to pay councillors to attend extra meetings to discuss the anti-poverty strategy? Which council insists on using its own employees for maintenance work and refuses to give outside contractors a fair chance to compete? Which council uses council tax payers' money to fund the appointment of someone called a "black sexual health project worker"? Is it Islington, Lambeth, Southwark, or perhaps Liverpool in the 1980s? No, it is Suffolk county council under a Labour and Liberal Democrat administration; the same council that claims that the resources given to it by central Government are so grossly inadequate.

Will the hon. Member for North–West Durham confirm that each of the points that I have mentioned represents the priorities of new Labour throughout the country, or will she for the first time issue a ringing condemnation from the House of what her party is doing to the people of Suffolk?

The tragedy is that Suffolk is under a political leadership that is so ruthless, doctrinaire and dogmatic that the councillors' attitudes are even starting to affect the officers. In a Suffolk county council education department publication, printed and circulated at council tax payers' expense, a Suffolk county council official—not an elected councillor, but an official—described the Government as

"some manic stage manager"

who

"keeps changing the set and the scripts."

That officer went on to describe the local government review as "nonsense" and attacked privatisation as the cause of

"fragmentation at all levels of government".

My voters in South Suffolk who enjoy cheaper gas, a better telephone service and all the other improvements that privatisation has brought about, might think that it was worth a bit of "fragmentation". The council has so persuaded its senior officers to respond to its political agenda that they are using official publications, circulated at council tax payers' expense, to spout party political propaganda.

My second theme is the new Labour sleaze. Over the past three and a half years, Suffolk county council has systematically set out to starve rural areas of resources in order to reward its political allies in the towns with ever more expensive new toys. I reiterate that the county council's policies had the full and complete endorsement of the Liberal Democrat party in that matter.

The thrust of the council's transport policy is based on that systematic discrimination against villages and the countryside; spending on roads in rural areas is cut so that the budget can be switched to pay for schemes in the towns. The budget for the footpaths that were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds has almost completely disappeared.

Perhaps the council believes that, if a Labour Government are elected, Parliament will immediately approve a statutory right to roam, and that, when everyone has a legal right to blunder across fields and gardens, through hedges and over ditches, footpaths will no longer be needed at all. I think that it is more likely that, as the council's committee chairmen ride around in their cars and claim their travel allowances, they simply do not recognise or even think about the crucial importance of footpaths in a county such as Suffolk.

Mr. Gummer: And bull bars.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend makes an important point, to which we would return if there were time.

It is not only transport policy that discriminates against the rural areas: charges have been introduced for school transport for over-16-year-olds, which is not a problem for residents in the middle of Ipswich but, my goodness, is a big issue in the rural heartlands where traditional Suffolk families are brought up.

My third and final theme is the sheer incompetence of Suffolk county council. It is not surprising, perhaps, that a council as doctrinaire as this—with such a highly political agenda—should also be incompetent, because such councils nearly always are. But it is worth emphasising just how taxpayers' money is being thrown away. Charitably, I shall select an example of when a project was chosen in a rural area—in Brantham, a small village in my constituency that is close to my home in East Bergholt.

The village was the site of a bizarre traffic experiment, introduced at a cost of £36,000, whereby the road was subject to barriers. They created a dangerous traffic flow, and near-misses and minor accidents became an almost daily occurrence. Pollution increased dramatically as cars slowed down, and my constituents could not get in and out of their driveways. The experiment was an unmitigated disaster from the day it was introduced, and everyone except the county council recognised it. The council did not recognise it because, with its typically arrogant disregard for public opinion and the merits of argument, it refused even to come and see the system in operation. A further £5,000 was wasted tinkering with the scheme, and finally—after almost two years—it was abandoned. The cost of removal amounted to a further £10,000, so over £50,000 in total was involved.

Suffolk county council has become a byword for incompetence, sleaze and political dogma. On 1 May, the voters of Suffolk will have a chance to put an end to all that. Also on 1 May, the voters of Britain will have a chance to avoid imposing the same fate on the whole country.

11.50 am

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am grateful for the chance to take part in today's debate. You will be aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, unfortunately, there are no Liberal Democrat Members representing Suffolk yet, but it was quite clear from the anti-Liberal Democrat remarks of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) that he at least expects his seat to fall to us next time round. That is the most likely result of the forthcoming general election in that constituency.

I wish to start by referring to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), including his declaration that he wished dialogue to take place between himself and the county council. He flashed before the House this morning a headline from his local paper, and among my papers this morning is a headline that says: "Tory MPs declare war on council". If the hon. Gentleman feels that that is the right way to start a dialogue, his electors may have a different idea.

Mr. Spring: The hon. Gentleman completely misses the point. There has been no dialogue for four years, and we—as Suffolk Members of Parliament—have had to put up with that. To criticise Suffolk Members a matter of weeks before the county council elections for rightly reacting with anger to what has gone on reflects an attitude of mind that is wholly inappropriate, and shows the hon. Gentleman's complete lack of understanding of the circumstances in Suffolk.

Mr. Rendel: That in no way answers the point I was making, which is that the hon. Gentleman's approach was no way to start dialogue. He mentioned, as did the hon. Member for South Suffolk, that there had been "scaremongering" by the county council. It is worth drawing the House's attention to three points. First, before the planning figures for what might happen to the council tax this year were produced by the county council, all the figures on which the council based its assumptions were checked with the Secretary of State and agreed by him. Secondly, the local auditors, Coopers and Lybrand, confirmed in a management letter that working out what the costs might be was a prudent and sensible way to plan the local council budget.

Mr. Lord: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is an enormous difference between paid officers doing their homework behind the scenes and looking at the various permutations that may exist, depending on the money that the council receives, and whipping up a huge amount of emotion and terrifying the whole education establishment of Suffolk?

Mr. Rendel: That intervention illustrates once again the way in which Conservatives like to plan—in back rooms, behind the scenes and without consulting the public. What a terrible way to perform. What a dereliction of their duty that they should try to hide from the public what might happen. They are trying not to give the public any right to take part in discussions about the future. It is absurd that they should try to plan in that way without involving the public, and it is quite the wrong way to act in government—whether it be at central or local level.

The third, and perhaps most telling, point—which concerns the so-called "scaremongering"—was that Conservative members of the council agreed with what was happening and that it was a prudent way to plan. Those members thought that this was the right way to look at what might happen to the budget in the year ahead. Are

[Mr. Rendel]

Conservative Members saying that their party colleagues on the county council were—to quote the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds—"crying wolf" and "scaremongering"? Conservative members of the council agreed to the plan.

The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds was not pleased that some of his local papers were turning against the Conservatives, which shows that the papers have been forced to conclude that what the county council was saying had a lot of sense behind it. All I can say is that, if he is worried about his local papers turning against the Conservatives for once, he should try being a Liberal Democrat. We know what it is like to have Tory-supporting newspapers saying the most awful nonsense about us, time after time. If he is worried that a Conservative-run paper—as I have no doubt it is—in his area has suddenly found that the truth is so clear that it has to complain about what is happening to local people under a Conservative Government, he should experience what is happening elsewhere.

I have one point of agreement with Conservative Members. It is true that Labour is promising no more, and shame on it for that. It is also true that, although Conservative party members may not want more money for local government, they do want—they have, as I have said before in the House, made it their official policy—the cap to be lifted. They are right, and it is to the shame of this Government that they have not gone along with their own members' requirement in the motion that was passed by the Conservative party conference.

I wish to refer to the council's efficiency, or lack of it. Since the new administration took over in Suffolk three or four years ago, there have been no less than £40 million-worth of cuts. Some of those, sadly and inevitably, have been real cuts in services, but a large proportion have been efficiency savings. There always will be some efficiency savings that any large organisation can make, year on year, and that has been done effectively by this administration.

If Conservative Members are now saying that the present county council is inefficient, how much more inefficient must the previous Conservative administration have been before those £40 million-worth of cuts were made? The Conservatives controlled Suffolk for more than 100 years, yet at the end of that period the new Liberal and Labour administration has been able to make massive efficiency savings over the short four years that it has been in power. I am delighted that Conservative Members are saying that the new administration is still inefficient, in so far as that must mean that they condemn out of hand the previous Conservative administration, which was rightly thrown out of office four years ago.

You may remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker—no one else does—that on the Order Paper the debate is entitled, "Revenue support grant for Suffolk county council". Conservative Members have barely mentioned the revenue support grant for the county council, for which the Government are responsible. They have been interested only in how the county council behaves and whether its policies are efficient and sensible. That is not the Government's responsibility. I do not know how the Secretary of State can be expected to reply on behalf of the county council. Had Conservative Members remarked on the revenue support grant, he could have replied because that is what he is responsible for, but he cannot be expected to reply on behalf of the county council.

The only time that the revenue support grant was mentioned was when the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds said how good it was and how well Suffolk and his constituents had done compared to other parts of the country. It is clear from his figures that his constituents have not done well compared with real cost increases. That was an interesting change from the way in which Tory Members have hitherto spoken in the House about the settlements in their areas.

Mr. Yeo: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member from another part of the country, who as far as I know has not previously shown any interest in Suffolk, to take up so much time in the debate that my hon. Friends who represent Suffolk and who requested the debate will be denied the opportunity to speak?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it is in order; otherwise, it would have been ruled out of order.

Mr. Rendel: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds certainly said that the revenue support grant for Suffolk was good for his electorate. I should have thought that his electorate would have felt that their interests were best represented by their Members of Parliament coming to the House to fight for more Government money for Suffolk. That is what Members of Parliament for Suffolk, or at least those on the Conservative Benches, have so far failed to do.

If I lived in Suffolk and heard the debate today, with Conservative Members of Parliament for Suffolk failing to request a penny more from the Government in this debate and saying that, in spite of the £40 million in cuts in the past four years, the Government were doing well by Suffolk, I would make sure that I did not vote Tory at the next general election.

12.1 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Central Suffolk): It is clear from the speech of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) that he does not understand Suffolk. There is no doubt that Conservative Members of Parliament for Suffolk make out the strongest possible case for their constituents and their county. They just do not do so in the ridiculous, high-profile and propagandist way that the present administration is doing. The hon. Gentleman talks about cuts. As far as I am concerned, cuts mean that one does not get next year what one thought one ought to get. The general public tend to feel that cuts mean that they will not get next year what they got this, which is completely untrue—pick a figure, and if one does not get the figure one wants, it is described as a cut.

I shall be as brief as possible as this is a short debate. I am delighted that we have had this debate, but I speak almost more in sorrow than in anger. I am sorry about the way in which the relationship between Suffolk county council, the House and Conservative Members of Parliament representing Suffolk has deteriorated in recent years.

Central Government have always allocated budgets to local government. It has to be that way. The Chancellor has to be in control. One never knows what might happen

to the national economy, and that has always been so. In the past, local authorities accepted the money that they were given—some years they got more and some years less—and got on with it. That was until Liverpool city council started to do ridiculous things a few years ago, and the Greater London council followed suit.

Sadly, that tendency seems to have spread and, since the Liberal and Labour administration took over in Suffolk, it also seems to have spread to our county, doing great damage to the county, to its standing here and in Whitehall, and certainly to the relationship with Conservative Members of Parliament, which had been good. I want that relationship to be repaired if possible, but I fear that it will not happen under the present administration.

I must make two points. The first is the way in which the education budget was treated this year. Despite what the hon. Member for Newbury, who speaks for the Liberal party, and the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) say, there is no doubt that a massive, unfair and grotesque campaign was mounted about the state of education this year. Primarily, it has had nothing to do with the amount of funding that Suffolk has received, but much more to do with pure propaganda on behalf of the councillors who are in charge.

Recently, I attended a meeting of teachers, parents and governors in Stowmarket. I went to talk to them about education and I thought that they would want to talk about the performance of our Suffolk schools, of streaming, selection, opting out or not opting out, of class sizes and of the drugs problem in Suffolk, which sadly is growing. I thought that they would want to discuss those things, but not a bit of it—all they wanted to talk about was more money, more money, more money. We all know that they are not going to get more money, whoever is in central Government. The Labour party will not give them more and that is for sure. I wanted to talk to them, not about money but about all the other issues involved. They did not want to talk about those, and I was surprised.

What saddened me most was the way in which a large number of the people in the audience seemed to have bought the story being sold by the chairman of the education committee. He was present at the meeting, slumped in his seat for three quarters of it, until he finally made his presence known and delivered a ridiculous party political broadcast on behalf of his party as the audience's eyes glazed over. What a farce, and how unfair.

Like all hon. Members, I try to keep in touch with my constituents, with their problems and with education. To go to such a meeting and to hear nothing other than, "Yah! Boo! Give us more money," was appalling. In fairness to the audience, it was because they had been so deceived by the administration and made so anxious about what might happen that they felt that that was the way to go about things. As we all know, the truth has proved different.

Obviously, everyone wants more money for every possible department. We understand that. We have problems with our hospitals in Suffolk and we want more money spent on roads—social services no doubt want more money. It is someone's responsibility to carve up that cake and it has to be done centrally in the House. It will be done that way whoever is the Chancellor of the Exchequer and whichever party is in power. If local government cannot behave more sensibly when it is given a fair distribution, we are on the rocky road to all sorts of problems.

My second point is on the balance between spending in rural and in urban areas. A quarter of Ipswich is in my constituency—I share the town with the hon. Member for Ipswich. We have a park-and-ride scheme along the Norwich road, and bus lanes have been put in to establish the scheme. An enormous sum is being spent on it—money that could be spent more sensibly in other parts of Ipswich or in rural areas. The scheme will prove a complete white elephant. A bus lane already goes right the way down the Norwich road, but I rarely see buses in it. All it has done is produce queues of cars.

At the Suffolk county council transport committee meeting yesterday, someone told me that it is not a park-and-ride scheme at all, but just a bus lane. That is news to me and to the Secretary of State for Transport. I suspect that it is also news to Ipswich borough council, because it thought that it was on the way to a park-and-ride scheme. I think that the county council has discovered that there will not be enough money for the park, so we are just going to get the ride. There are massive queues of people in cars because of the bus lanes. Those bus lanes are there so that people can leave their cars and get on the buses, but they have nowhere to leave their cars.

What a ridiculous scheme, and what a huge waste of money. Does that not sum up the incompetence of the county council, the difference between rural and urban projects and the fact that the council is incapable of getting its priorities right and looking after the interests of the people whose money it is spending?

As I am conscious that time is short, I will bring my remarks to a close simply by saying that I sincerely believe, with my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), that the county council's performance has deteriorated hugely in the past few years. More important, its understanding of how to behave and communicate and of the relationship between it and the House has gone badly wrong. I believe that that will change only when we change the administration. I hope very much that on 1 May we will get this lot out and a Conservative administration back in county hall, so that we can get back to common sense and a decent deal for the people of Suffolk.

12.9 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): We have heard much about the county as a whole, but parts of Waveney in north Suffolk are different. Suffolk is a big and varied county. There is a Suffolk identity but there are distinctly different areas in Waveney that need to be highlighted.

For many years, we were covered by Norfolk, not Suffolk, ambulances. We are still part of the Norfolk and Waveney training and enterprise council. Most of my constituents listen to BBC Radio Norfolk rather than to Radio Suffolk. Most people go to the Norfolk, show, few to the Suffolk show. We often look to Norfolk but we are proud to be part of Suffolk. That is why I share some of the concern of my hon. Friends about how the county council has behaved in the past four years.

There is a remoteness about Ipswich and events there that alienates people in my part of Suffolk. There is a feeling that big brother knows best. That is illustrated

[Mr. David Porter]

graphically by the traffic exhibition in Bungay, which is as far as one can get in Suffolk from Ipswich. To solve a heavy lorry problem in Bungay, the county council proposed to route several hundred heavy goods vehicles a day through the villages of Flixton and Homersfield on a minor road. It was only after an outcry from the villagers that it reluctantly agreed to public consultation and an exhibition. That shows that big brother knows best unless people make a fuss and fight back.

We have spent much time talking about education—rightly, because it uses a lot of the taxpayers' money that the county council spends. I use the county's education in a big way; I have four children, all in local authority schools. It was as a parent that I first became alarmed by the circulars from schools, heads and, in some cases, governors. Later, my constituents alerted me as their Member of Parliament to the threats and scares about the alleged budget cuts. If the authors of the circulars had waited, they could have campaigned on the facts.

The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) said that the county council had always campaigned like that, regardless of who was in control. The difference is that, this time, heads and some school governors were publicly behind the campaign. It was that which alarmed parents. They believe their head teachers in the same way that patients believe doctors before they will believe the facts given by the Government.

Some years ago, when the scaremongering campaign started, I asked the Government what were the reserves in school funds in Suffolk. Suffolk had the fifth highest in the country. It is facts we need, not scaremongering, but that has been a hallmark of the county. That authority has urbanised the entire county council, placed kerbstones in most rural areas, and put a blanket 30 mph speed limit in villages. While 30 mph may be right for some villages, the blanket approach is wrong. Big brother knows best.

Finally, why does the county council think that it can run all the social services homes in Suffolk much better than the private sector, when the costings clearly show that the private sector delivers the best service? The administration of the county council has been a disaster; the sooner it goes, the better.

12.13 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (North–West Durham): I shall be brief because the Secretary of State wants to speak. As it is his county, he wants to make a substantial contribution. I want to be fair and allow him to do so.

However, fairness has not been prevalent in the debate, and that has saddened me. It is our role to recognise that local government is the legitimate tier of government for education, social services and so on. Inevitably and rightly, local government is much closer to local ambitions and anxieties than we are. It has a job to do. It is our job to question and challenge, but we must recognise that councils are elected to do a job, and that we should support them in doing it.

I was concerned about the ignorance of some Conservative Members of where local government finance has gone in recent years. No Conservative Member—I say this particularly to the hon. Member for Central Suffolk (Mr. Lord)—mentioned the change in local government following the incredible mess left by the poll tax. That led to 80 per cent. of local government spending being determined by central Government. It hasnow led the Secretary of State to acknowledge that that is a ridiculous way to fund local government.

For the past two years, the Government have signalled that they wish to begin to put more of the burden on local council tax payers. That is why they made it clear in the Red Book after the Budget that, over the next three years, local government will be expected to raise an additional £4 billion to meet the requirements that the Government identify for local government spending.

It is no good hon. Members ranting about how local government sets its priorities. We allow it little latitude in setting them, as the hon. Member for Central Suffolk said. Most priorities are set in the House by the Secretary of State and approved by the House.

The debate on education has been interesting. The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) wanted it both ways, but that is all right. I wondered whether he was really saying that the local authority should not prioritise or expand nursery education. I hope that he can reassure his constituents that he supports high-quality nursery education. All the evidence shows that that is the best way to ensure that children get the best start in education. The impact of nursery vouchers on the ability of local education authorities to ensure that all children get the opportunity of high-quality nursery education will in many counties be severe. It is no wonder that they are making sure that local people understand the importance of using nursery vouchers in local nursery classes.

I was asked some questions by the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). I, too, represent a largely rural constituency with limited urban occupation, so I have some knowledge of the problem of identifying how most effectively to support people in rural areas. He asked about our spending plans. I am sorry that he has not attended previous debates in which I have made clear our position on local government spending. If we win the next general election, we shall be left with levels of Government debt unprecedented since the war.

Given that, and given increasing pressure on inflation, we do not say that what the Government spend is adequate. We say that we are not prepared to put additional burdens on the British taxpayer. The tax burden on the ordinary British family is 3 per cent. higher than it was in 1979 as a result of the Government's incompetence. Therefore, we cannot expand the amount that we can do.

Other hon. Members have noted that all the county's transport policies are policies approved and supported by the Government. This year, Suffolk county council will spend £8 million more than the Government say that it should spend on education, yet Conservative Members complain. Over the past four years, Suffolk has spent £50 million more than the Government have said that it should. This year, education is the only service that is being protected; every other service is having to be cut to meet the limit.

It is up to all of us to ensure that local people receive the best services available. We must trust local government to decide its priorities. Local councils will be put to the test this year, just as we will, and the people of Suffolk will decide which party they want to guard their interests.

12.19 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): The most important way in which local authorities and Members of Parliament can work is together. I have always believed in that, and in the past I have been able to participate, with colleagues from other political parties, in discussions with the Government of the time on the issues affecting Suffolk.

I was surprised at the beginning of the new Labour-Liberal coalition when Suffolk county council told me that, in future, political bosses, not officials, would respond to all letters. I was told that I would not receive replies to letters on behalf of constituents, who would be contacted by the local authority. The Member of Parliament who had raised the case would ultimately receive a copy of letters that had been written to constituents. The council began to behave like any other county council only after I pointed out to it very firmly that its behaviour would have to be raised with the authorities of the House of Commons as being entirely inappropriate. That was a bad beginning for the relationship between Members of Parliament and the county council.

I can therefore excuse the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) for not understanding that the situation in Suffolk was different from that in any other council that I know. The council started with the intention of having no dialogue with Members of Parliament, which perhaps explains why I have received no request from it to bring its officials and members from all parties to lobby the Government, as other councils do. I have not received a request from the council to talk to its members. I have not received any requests from the county council except requests that were so party political that it was difficult to take them seriously.

I understand why the motion has been tabled today. It is not just a general criticism of a party structure with which my hon. Friends disagree, but a particular criticism of a specific county council which has behaved in an entirely unSuffolk-like way. It never happened with previous administrations, which always sought to act on an all-party basis over matters affecting the county. I was lucky enough to be able to work in that way, even with people who, as candidates, had fought me in previous elections.

The education standard spending assessment increase in Suffolk has been significant, as has the overall increase.

Mr. Cann: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) is in a strange position: he is the Secretary of State and, as such, I thought that he would respond to the debate. But he is also a Suffolk Member of Parliament. Are you quite clear about which role he is currently playing?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I do not take responsibility for what an hon. Member says, whether he is a Secretary of State or the humblest of Back Benchers. All I am concerned about is whether the contribution is relevant to the subject in hand.

Mr. Gummer: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Last year, Suffolk had an education SSA increase of 4.1 per cent., which compares with the shire county average of 3.5 per cent. It received more than the average; it did so in the context of an official Opposition party which says that it would not increase the amount of money available were it ever to gain power. Suffolk county council has therefore received significantly more of an agreed amount of money than its neighbours and significantly more than the average, which contrasts with a county-wide determination to have a 5 per cent. cut.

When I, as Secretary of State—

Mr. Cann: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No. The hon. Gentleman did not give way and I shall not give way.

When I, as Secretary of State, saw the situation, I told the county council that it could not possibly know what sort of settlement would be made, because I had not decided on it; I was still discussing it. When Opposition Members suggest that I agreed the county council figures, that is precisely the opposite of the truth. I told the county council directly and without question that no decisions about the figures had been made. The county council still insisted that there would be 5 per cent. cuts.

The results showed—as the council knew perfectly well that they would—an improvement in its position owing to the Government's determination to protect the education budget. Having said how desperate the cuts would be for education, the county council did not rush to spend the money on education in the previous year. It did not do so, although it was able to spend significant sums—above £10 million, and well up on what it had expected. It did not spend the money on education, but took some of it for other things.

I am surprised that my hon. Friends did not mention the proliferation of large placards throughout the constituency that have suburbanised the area. Every village has a large notice that not only states its name, but has yellow backing and three white bars. Many of the placards have the word "village" on them in case people do not realise that it is a village. All the placards were paid for out of the money—more than £2 million. The money did not need to be spent in that way; our schools could have done with it.

This is an urbanising county. The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) said that the chairman of the county council's education committee came from a country constituency. In fact, he represents the almost entirely built-up area of Stowmarket. The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of the county is the same as the Labour party's knowledge of county life—that is the problem that we face in the county of Suffolk.

The comments of the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) on nursery education were scandalous. She evidently supports the county council's policy of threatening parents and saying that, if they choose to use their vouchers anywhere other than in the county council's nursery schools, they will be less likely to be able to send their children to the primary schools of their choice. Such bribery is unacceptable in a free society.

[Mr. Gummer]

The incompetence of Suffolk county council can be clearly shown. In June 1996, Suffolk employed 21.3 staff per thousand of its population, compared with a shire county average of 19.3. The figure for Lincolnshire, a similar council, is 16.6 and for Norfolk, 19.3. Even Berkshire does better than Suffolk, with 21.3 staff per thousand of its population.

Opposition Members talk about a competent council administration. The fact of the matter is that the county council has suffered from the continuous internal strife between the chairman of the county council education committee and the leader of the council, and that is why there cannot be a common view among hon. Members on both sides of the House to bring to Ministers the concerns of Suffolk—there is not even a common view within the Labour party. The two of them fight like cat and dog and appear at all meetings together so as to ensure that neither says what he has promised not to say.

That makes Suffolk the one county that cannot be properly represented to Government—there is not the necessary dialogue. The dialogue was broken when the present administration came into power. I am sorry that we have had to have this debate, because I want to work with the county council and am prepared to do so under any administration—but it has to be prepared to work with me.

Incapacity Benefit

12.30 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am pleased to have secured parliamentary time to debate this issue, which will undoubtedly apply to thousands of people throughout the British Isles.

The best way of highlighting the problem is by describing the circumstances surrounding the case of my constituent, Mrs. Ann Weatherby of Brynhailog, Abertafol, Aberdyfi. In 1989, due to her having to retire on the ground of ill health, Mrs. Weatherby applied successfully for invalidity—now incapacity—benefit. She did not wish to relinquish her post as a headmistress, but she had no option but to do so because of her medical condition. In September 1992, she was informed that she would no longer qualify for incapacity benefit when she attained the age of 60—state retirement age—the following January.

I shall pause in Mrs. Weatherby's story for a minute or two to explain the background. The Government's reasoning for incapacity benefit is really an application of the principle of restitutio in integrum—in other words, it is an income replacement benefit that is designed to replace loss of income during working life, and the rate of benefit after state pension age is linked to pension entitlement as part of an interlocking system of contributory benefits.

Mrs. Weatherby's contract of employment and her conditions of service—the national conditions of service applicable to head teachers—would have allowed her to continue in employment until 65. This is therefore a clear case of discrimination which is embodied in United Kingdom law. It is also the crux of my argument, and it will assist us in our detailed consideration of the case and its ramifications if I refer to two recent authorities on this subject.

The two cases that bear directly on the facts of Mrs. Weatherby's case are those of Graham—which is reported in CS27/1991—and Thomas and others *v.* the Secretary of State for Social Security, which came before the European Court of Justice. At first instance, a social security commissioner ruled that a woman receiving invalidity benefit should not have her benefit reduced when she reached 60, because a man would not have his benefit reduced until he reached 65.

There is a body of European law that outlaws discrimination on the ground of sex. I refer briefly to council directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security. Article 4 states:

"The principle of equal treatment that there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex either directly, or indirectly by reference in particular to marital or family status in particular as concerns:

—the scope of the schemes and the conditions of access thereto,

—the obligation to contribute and the calculation of contributions,

—the calculation of benefits including increases due in respect of a spouse and for dependants and the conditions governing the duration and retention of entitlement to benefits."

However, in article 7(1), the directive allows member states to exclude from its scope the determination of pensionable age for the purpose of granting old-age and retirement pension

"and the possible consequences thereof for other benefits".

These are the most important words, because they seem to justify legal discrimination in this area.

The Thomas case went to the Court of Appeal, where it was held that the words

"and the possible consequences thereof for other benefits"

had to be construed strictly and in accordance with the Community principle of proportionality. Indeed, any derogation from the equality principle must remain within the limits of what was appropriate and necessary for achieving that aim.

In a case parallel with that of Thomas, a social security commissioner in the Graham case took an important view of the whole matter—interestingly, the commissioner concerned was called Skinner. He looked at the argument advanced by the Secretary of State in Thomas, which was reported in *The Times* on 22 August 1990. It was contended that Parliament had found it necessary to distinguish between people of working life and those not of working life by reference to the pattern of employment—the working patterns of men and women differ, with women tending to retire at 60 and men at 65—and that, until that pattern changed, income replacement benefit had to be tied to pensionable age. There was a link between the use of pensionable age in connection with retirement pension and its use in connection with other income replacement benefits.

The commissioner rejected that approach. He referred to the Court of Appeal judgment in Thomas in which, as I have said, the court held that the words

"and the possible consequences thereof for other benefits"

had to be construed strictly and in accordance with the Community principle of proportionality. The commissioner quoted from the judgment of Lord Justice Slade, who said:

"Construing the phrase 'and the possible consequences thereof for other benefits' strictly and in accordance with the principle of proportionality, I conclude that it gives Member States authority to prescribe or retain different age limits for men and women when defining the qualifications for entitlement to benefits other than old-age and retirement benefits only when this is a necessary consequence of their having defined the qualifications for entitlement to old-age or retirement benefits by reference to different age limits for men and women and only in a manner which is appropriate to meet this necessity."

The commissioner, rejecting the argument advanced on behalf of the assessing officer, said that he had difficulty accepting the concept of a deemed end of working life and that he could see no reason why invalidity benefit should have a different cut-off point for men and women. He went on to say:

"I have asked myself whether the fixing of pensionable ages—different ages for men and women—requires a special rule relating to invalidity pension which would also discriminate. I cannot see that such is a necessary consequence of Parliament having defined the qualifications for entitlement to retirement pension by reference to different age limits for men and women. I see no objective link . . . in my view it was not necessary to gear invalidity benefit to retirement age."

Finally, the commissioner went on to consider the issue of invalidity allowance. The claimant was awarded invalidity pension in April 1989 when she was 58 years old. It was argued on her behalf that, if a man had become incapable at the same age as the claimant, he would have been entitled to invalidity allowance. He would have been more than five years away from the pensionable age for men, which is 65, whereas the claimant was not more than five years away from the pensionable age for women, which is 60. The commissioner accepted that argument, and concluded that the claimant was also entitled to invalidity allowance payable at the lower rate.

The commissioner had originally adjourned the hearing of that case to await the outcome of the appeal by the Secretary of State from the decision of the Court of Appeal in Thomas. The Court of Appeal had heard five cases together, collectively known as Thomas. The Court of Appeal held that the discriminatory upper age limit is in breach of the directive on equal treatment in social security. It said that it was not a "possible consequence" of the setting of different pension ages for the granting of old-age or retirement pension and therefore did not escape the requirement that there should be no discrimination. Women were entitled to severe disablement allowance or incapacity allowance, as appropriate, in the same way that a man of the same age would be.

"Halsbury's Laws of England", from which Lord Justice Slade quoted in the Thomas case, states:

"The principle of proportionality requires that the means used to attain a given end should be no more than what is appropriate and necessary to attain that end; in other words, persons may be obliged only to make the least sacrifice consonant with achieving the objective sought.

In order to establish whether a principle of Community law is compatible with the principle of proportionality, it is necessary to establish whether the means it employs to achieve its aim correspond to the importance of the aim and whether those means are necessary in order to achieve it.

Whether a measure is disproportionate or not is not necessarily determined by reference to the individual position of any one particular group of operators. The principle of proportionality applies also to national measures."

In his judgment, Lord Justice Slade said:

"Thus, even apart from the inconclusive nature of the statistics placed before the court, the, as yet unknown, impact of the *Barber* decision was a further reason why the sex discrimination involved in sections 36(4)(d) and 37(5) could be justified by reference to the assumed working life of a woman as opposed to a man.

A general assumption of that kind, which took no account of individual circumstances and made without adequate factual basis, itself discriminated against women.

The onus had to fall on the secretary of state to show that the designation of different age limits for men and women, when defining the qualifications for entitlement to SDA and ICA, was a necessary consequence of Parliament's having defined the qualifications for entitlement to old-age and retirement benefits by reference to different age limits for men and women."

For the reasons that he had given earlier, his Lordship concluded that he did not think that that onus had been, or could be, discharged. Accordingly, the Secretary of State's appeal was dismissed.

The Secretary of State then appealed to the House of Lords, which in turn referred the case to the European Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling. That court eventually held in favour of the Secretary of State. It is interesting that the Government were able to put aside their disdain for, and distrust of, the European Court of Justice and apply to it in this case when they found it convenient to do so.

Whatever financial repercussions might result from changing the law, I believe that there is a moral imperative to do so. To put it another way: what price justice, fairness

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

and decency? Surely there is not too high a price on those principles, which I think should be uppermost in the thinking of any Government Department—especially the Department of Social Security. How can any Government pay lip service to the principle of equality and stand by this iniquitous position?

The Minister may respond by telling me that matters of social security are outside the scope of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, by virtue of section 51. I am fully aware of that fact. However, the EC directive to which I referred lays down certain minima that are expected of member states in awarding statutory social security benefits. I believe that the Thomas decision is unsatisfactory because it upholds sexual discrimination and, therefore, the law should be changed. I believe also that it is abhorrent that women should be treated so unfairly with the full sanction of the law.

In the case of my constituent, Mrs. Weatherby appealed the decision, and was initially successful in that her payment was restored in full. However, consequent on the Thomas decision, the position was reversed, and Mrs. Weatherby was told to appeal to a social security tribunal. She did so, and I appeared before a tribunal—unpaid—on her behalf on 28 January this year. Although we received a very sympathetic hearing, the tribunal considered itself bound by the Thomas decision and, therefore, could not find in my constituent's favour.

That is why I applied for the debate today. By highlighting this problem, I believe that we can initiate a serious debate that will lead to a change in the law. I am indebted to my constituent, Mrs. Weatherby, for her determination and perseverance and for her resolve to fight for a principle, despite the fact that she was unlikely to gain personally. I applaud her tireless efforts and her selfless attitude. The Equal Opportunities Commission and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux have assisted me in highlighting the argument.

In opening this important debate, I said that I believed that the situation would affect thousands of women throughout the British Isles. This morning, I received a telephone call from a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), Mrs. Morfidd Strange of Gelli Aur, Commins Coch, Aberystwyth, who told me about her situation. She was also a teacher who suffered extreme facial pain and was forced to retire early through ill health. When she was awarded incapacity benefit some years ago, the officer assured her that it would be paid until she was 65. Recently, and without warning, she received a letter saying that the benefit would cease when she attained the age of 60. Her weekly income from that source summarily dropped from £76.33 to £40.72. She also told me that she knew of at least three similar cases in the Aberystwyth area alone. Therefore, I conclude that the problem is widespread.

I am sure that we all believe in equal treatment for people of different sexes. I think that this situation is a glaring omission which must be put right. I invite the Minister to state today whether that area of policy will be reviewed. Failure to do so would condone unfairness and discrimination—which can never be the aim of any Government in any civilised society.

This is only the start of the campaign, and I urge any future Labour Government to make a commitment to equal rights, such as evidenced by Labour's worthy campaign to secure greater female representation in the House. I believe that it is also incumbent on any future Labour Government to put that principle into practice and end this iniquitous and offensive discrimination, whatever the cost.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): The issue that we are debating concerns the rules for the payment of invalidity benefit to people over pension age. Until April 1995, invalidity benefit was the main social security provision for sick and disabled people who were incapable of work in the long term. Hon. Members will recall that we overhauled that benefit provision in April 1995 and replaced invalidity benefit with the new incapacity benefit.

I think that it is important to ensure that we do not lose sight of the background to that significant improvement. The rapid growth in recent years in both expenditure on invalidity benefit and in the number of people receiving it was beyond dispute. If left unchecked, spending on that benefit alone was forecast to reach £10 billion by the end of the century; yet there was no evidence of any deterioration in the health of the nation as a whole—no wonder concerns were growing that invalidity benefit might be going to people for whom it was never intended. No responsible Government could ignore those developments.

That is why we replaced invalidity benefit with incapacity benefit in April 1995. We have provided a more objective test of people's ability to work, to ensure that benefit is focused on those who are genuinely incapable. The changes ensure a fair system for people who are unable to work that is also fair to the taxpayer. These reforms are a major success, and are on course to reduce expenditure by £2.3 billion a year in the long term.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) for the energy that he has devoted to pursuing this specific case, and I congratulate him on securing this Adjournment debate. His interest in these matters is such that my officials had no difficulty identifying the case that he wished to raise. I am grateful to him for confirming the specifics of that case, and I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue. Having examined Mrs. Weatherby's case, I am satisfied that her benefit claim has been handled correctly by the Benefits Agency. The hon. Gentleman may find it useful if I outline the background to the rules that have led to the decision in Mrs. Weatherby's case.

Under the invalidity benefit scheme that existed before the introduction of incapacity benefit in April 1995, payment of benefit could continue for up to five years beyond the state pension age. However, for people over pension age, the amount of benefit paid was based on the rate of retirement pension to which they would be entitled if they had claimed it instead. That meant that invalidity benefit changed to the pension rate, as the hon. Gentleman said, at the age of 60 for women and 65 for men.

Unlike invalidity benefit, the amount of retirement pension to which people are entitled depends on their overall national insurance contribution record throughout

their working life. That is why people who chose to stay on invalidity benefit found that it went down after they reached pension age, if they had not paid enough national insurance contributions to qualify for a full-rate retirement pension. That is what happened in Mrs. Weatherby's case.

I should explain that that rule simply put such people in the same position as those who had been working immediately before reaching retirement age. That is clearly right, as to do otherwise would have placed pensioners who chose to remain on invalidity benefit at an unfair advantage over those receiving their retirement pension.

We have always believed that those rules complied with European equal treatment law. In particular, directive 79/7/EEC on equal treatment in social security specifically allows different pension ages for men and women, along with the possible consequences for other benefits. However, on 1 April 1992, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, a social security commissioner decided that such different treatment of men and women was not permitted by the directive, and that invalidity benefit in payment to women should not be changed to the pension rate when they reached the age of 60.

The Secretary of State and the chief adjudication officer jointly appealed against the social security commissioner's decision to the Court of Appeal. As a result, the increased rate of invalidity benefit awarded to women after the age of 60 was suspended by the Secretary of State pending the outcome of the appeal and clarification of the law.

The Government acknowledged that, while the appeal was outstanding, this area of the law remained unsettled, and were sensitive to the concerns of the women affected. That is why we decided not to impose the suspension of the increased benefit in cases of hardship. Mrs. Weatherby was one of a number of women who were allowed to continue receiving the higher rate of benefit awarded as a result of the commissioner's decision, even though that decision remained the subject of an appeal.

In January 1994, the Court of Appeal decided to refer the case to the European Court of Justice for a preliminary ruling on questions of European law relevant to the case. The European Court of Justice delivered its ruling on 11 August 1995. That ruling fully supported the Government's position and confirmed that the linking of invalidity benefit rules to state pension age was permitted by European law.

The case was formally disposed of by the Court of Appeal in December 1995. By that time, invalidity benefit had been replaced by the new incapacity benefit, and those receiving it had transferred to the new benefit. Following the European Court's decision, the Benefits Agency undertook to review those cases where an increased amount of invalidity benefit was—as we now know—incorrectly awarded, following the commissioner's decision in April 1992.

Once those cases had been reviewed by an adjudication officer, in line with the court's decision, it followed that there was no longer any legal entitlement to the increased invalidity benefit. Accordingly, payments that were being made on the grounds of hardship automatically ceased.

I set out those points clearly to the hon. Gentleman, as that is precisely the position that applied to Mrs. Weatherby. I emphasise that the increased money paid to people in that position was based on a decision that was later held by the European Court to be incorrect. The money has therefore been overpaid. I can, however, reassure the hon. Gentleman that we will not take any action to recover those overpayments from his constituent or any others who were involved.

Mr. Llwyd: I appreciate the Minister's detailed response. It is a principle of social security law that, if the applicant has not fundamentally misled the agency, there is no ground for it to claim repayment, but I hear what the Minister says.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right in his interpretation of social security law. I stress that, in the circumstances, the money was overpaid, but that the Government will not seek to recover it.

The hon. Gentleman noted that the European Court ruled in Thomas that the different upper age limit breached European law. My response is that the Thomas case concerned non-contributory severe disablement allowance. The Graham case was decided by the European Court after the Thomas case, and the court held that the linking of contributory benefit to pension age was permitted by the European equal treatment directive.

Invalidity benefit and its replacement, incapacity benefit, are contributory benefits designed to replace earnings during periods of sickness. We believe that it is reasonable to limit or, as with incapacity benefit, to cease paying such a benefit when people reach an age where they are no longer required to work. Once a person has reached pension age, we believe that retirement pension or a benefit paid at the equivalent rate is appropriate.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister is generous in giving way again. The point at issue in the Weatherby case and the other cases to which I referred is that, under the national conditions of service, teachers are entitled to work until age 65. The Minister referred to people being

"no longer required to work."

There is a requirement to work until 65. It is a choice, of course, but it is a standard condition of service in the teaching profession. That distinguishes those cases.

Mr. Mitchell: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Sadly, however, for whatever reason, his constituent was unable to work. That is the key fact that the law and the Department of Social Security should take into account.

Income-related benefits would remain available for people who subsequently found themselves without sufficient income or other resources. The Government have made additional sums available to poorer pensioners who have no means of support other than the state pension. That is to protect people, especially poorer pensioners, on low incomes.

Linking the payments of invalidity benefit to people who have reached pension age to the retirement pension rate was not a new rule. It operated under successive Governments and was a long-established principle in the national insurance system as a necessary consequence of the different retirement ages for men and women.

The European Court of Justice ruling has confirmed that the United Kingdom may retain those rules linked to pension age, but in the longer term, as I am sure hon. Members are aware, the state pension age for men and

[Mr. Mitchell]

women will be equalised at age 65. The change will not be fully implemented until 2020, as it is being phased in gradually from 2010. When it is fully implemented, there will no longer be any difference in benefit provision for men and women. That meets, at least in part, the hon. Gentleman's concern about sex discrimination. Equalisation is the Government's policy and will be achieved by 2020.

Finally, I again congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and on the diligence with which he has pursued the case of Mrs. Weatherby, his constituent, including attending a social security appeal tribunal. Clearly, he has well served his constituent. I hope that my remarks, which may not satisfy him in full, will explain to him and to the House why the Government reached the conclusion they did in the case of his constituent.

Social Services (East Sussex)

12.58 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): This debate is very timely, coming on the day after the county council's budget meeting, and also the day after publication of "Better Value for Money in Social Services", of which more later.

On any view, the budget in East Sussex has been a moving target again this year. Across the whole range of spending—including spending on social services—we have seen the Liberal Democrat administration indulge in its usual mixture of scaremongering, blatant party politicking, and plain ineptitude. The technique is to hype up a range of possible so-called cuts in spending in order to antagonise and worry the maximum number of interest groups and individuals. When they understandably react, an attempt is made to blame the wicked Government.

For education, for example, East Sussex was given a generous funding increase of £7 million this year, but we have seen the spectacle of local Liberal Democrat politicians and paid officers of the council warning schools of the possibility of a £1.2 million cut in their budgets. Indeed, at meetings of governors only just before half-term, head teachers were reporting on possible redundancies among teaching staff. Only during the half-term holiday did the Liberal Democrats choose to unveil their plans, and to accept that there would now be no cuts in schools budgets. What an appalling way to treat professional people, as well as governors and parents.

The story in social services is, if anything, even more dismal. In the past, I have often accused the Liberal Democrats of behaving as if they were in opposition, when they are actually running things, and this year is no exception. In the words of Councillor Michael Tunwell, leader of the Conservative group on the county council, we are in the realms of "virtual reality" budgets. I look forward to the restoration of a competent and sensible Conservative administration on 1 May.

Predictably, the Liberal Democrats try to blame inadequate central Government funding. What are the facts? The standard spending assessment for 1997–98, on which Government grants are based, is to increase by 3.5 per cent., which is a larger increase than has been received by any county. If we assume that the council will spend up to its capping limit, that means a total this year of £305.5 million.

The total resources available for personal social services will amount to £123,322,000 in the current year. That represents no less than an 81 per cent. rise in real terms since 1990–91, compared to an average of 68 per cent. for the whole of England. Even over last year, there was an 8 per cent. increase in cash terms. The total resources available for community care have risen by 100 per cent. in real terms since 1990–91.

Some confusion has arisen because of the relationship between the special transitional grant and the SSA, and the switch from the one to the other. The STG was always intended to be temporary, as its name suggests. Also, we must see all those points against a background of dramatically increasing resources for personal social services.

Since 1994, all the new resources given to local authorities for their new community care responsibilities have been distributed according to the SSA formula.

It follows that there is no difference between the amount that authorities receive when the additional funds are paid via the STG, and the amount they receive when it is transferred into their baseline resources and paid according to the SSAs. It is possible to identify a small difference in resources for 1994-95, but it is essentially a presentational rather than a real difference. This is a complex issue, and I imagine that my hon. Friend the Minister will want to expand on it.

Actual spending in East Sussex has swung wildly back and forth in recent years. An underspend of £3 million on community care became a £4.22 million overspend in the current year, with the forecast of an overspend of £7.3 million next year.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Is there not a disturbing contradiction between the misleading claim of the chairman of social services that the county is actively encouraging independent care bed provision by the private sector, and the legitimate complaint of the Registered Nursing Home Association that none of the Government-funded increase is being passed on to the private sector? Has not the director of social services admitted to my hon. Friend, and to other colleagues, that private care beds in East Sussex cost much less than beds in care homes run by the county council? He has not grasped the nettle, however.

May I point out to my hon. Friend, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait)—who, being a Government Whip, is prevented from speaking by parliamentary rules—that the social services department in Lewes is refusing to meet the cost of referring patients to St Augustine's nursing home, thereby putting the management of St Michael's hospice in further jeopardy? Is that not a gross dereliction of responsibility?

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I intend to develop those points later in my speech, but let me say now that, even if the Government could be persuaded to give a few million extra pounds to East Sussex, there would be no guarantee that the money would find its way through the system to independent care home owners.

How wisely are these substantial sums being spent at present? East Sussex prides itself on hitting what it calls the Government's "target" for spending in the independent care sector. That, of course, is based on a false premise. The Government set a minimum figure of 85 per cent., but, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear:

> "The local authority's primary role is as an enabler and commissioner of services."

Is it really sensible for this or any other council to insist on keeping its own part III accommodation going, when it is often aging and unsatisfactory compared with provision in the private sector?

It is clear from correspondence I had last year with Mr. Holbrook, the director of social services, that, at long last, the council has begun to consider seriously whether to transfer provision from the public to the private sector. According to figures that I have seen, there is a disparity of at least £150 per bed per week between what the council spends on its own homes and the amount spent in the private sector. Only last year, Mr. Holbrook accepted that there was a potential net saving of £2 million, which is almost certainly an underestimate.

In any event, that money could be immediately available to meet other pressing needs in my constituency and elsewhere. May we be told what plans the county council now has to transfer provision from one sector to the other? It is significant that there is no provision in the capital programme for upgrading the council's part III accommodation. Does that perhaps show a lack of commitment on the part of the current administration to keep the homes open for much longer? As recently as 11 February, Mr. Holbrook confirmed in a letter to me that the council was engaged in

> "a reappraisal of the services which the County Council should continue to provide and a determination of those elements which are no longer needed."

Another issue is the cost of domiciliary care. I am told that, in the private sector, that can be provided at a cost of about £7 an hour, whereas in the public sector the cost is roughly double, at £14 or so. No wonder councils such as Kent—by no means a beacon of Conservative administration—contract out all their home visits, thus making significant savings.

The private care sector is a vital part of the local economy in Sussex. It is said to involve 10,000 jobs. I am indebted to Mr. Terry Fribbens of the East Sussex independent care group and his colleagues for pointing out to me the seriousness of the problem.

In my constituency, a number of homes have already gone out of business. We are told that the social services department is now operating a "one in, one out" policy. One distraught residential home owner contacted me a few days ago to say that he had been told by the department that it was freezing new referrals for at least two months. Stop-start policies of that kind can spell ruin, especially for small operators.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury (Hove): I think I am right in saying that the figures that my hon. Friend has just quoted are for East Sussex as now constituted. As he and my hon. Friend the Minister will know, the Labour-controlled unitary authority of Brighton and Hove will shortly be taken out of East Sussex. Is he aware that all the indications are that that local authority, if controlled by Labour as opposed to the Liberal Democrats—it is a matter of choice which is worse—is threatening to behave in exactly the same way as East Sussex in regard to care homes? That will have an equally damaging effect both on residents and on care home owners.

Mr. Waterson: I suspect that, in those circumstances, my right hon. Friend's worst fears will come to pass.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I hope that my hon. Friend is also aware that Wealden contains the largest district authority in East Sussex, and that the value of residential homes—in terms of the employment they provide, as well as the services they give—are highly prized.

Mr. Waterson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right.

[Mr. Waterson]

In a recent letter, Councillor Tutt, the chairman of social services, had this to say:

"Crudely this will mean a new client will not be provided with a service until the service to an existing client is terminated (usually on death). Inevitably the impact on the quality of life of people needing services, and on their carers, will be significant indeed. Legal challenges will doubtless materialise, and the businesses of a number of independent providers will be under very real threat."

On any view, those are pretty breathtaking admissions. Indeed, so lacking has financial discipline been under the present administration that, for the first time in living memory, officers of the council have had to take executive action, without prior reference to elected councillors, to try to bring the budget back under control. I hope that that point, among others, will not be lost on those who brought about a Liberal Democrat administration, either by voting for them, or more likely by simply staying at home on polling day.

Councillor Tutt goes on to say:

"Regrettably it will be impossible to avoid hospital bed blocking."

In addition to a self-imposed crisis in social services, East Sussex seems resigned to causing longer waiting lists in our local NHS.

I have long argued that one of the problems with social services in East Sussex is the council's mind set, which can be best summarised as "public sector good—private sector bad". Care home proprietors are incensed that the council, while freezing the weekly rates it pays them, will be adding to its overhead costs by allowing for a 2.5 per cent. rise in pay. On the other hand, the private sector will not be able to afford pay rises for staff, and in some cases will be looking at redundancies. That is not only wholly unfair, but makes no economic sense when the private sector is in a position to provide care that is at least as good as—if not better than—the public sector, and at significantly lower cost.

There are any number of examples of the strange priorities adopted by East Sussex. I have a letter from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which expressed considerable concern about the budget proposals in East Sussex.

I was recently visited at my advice surgery by Mrs. Ho, of Communicare, who runs a successful psychiatric day centre. She had been told that her funding from social services is likely to be cut. All that that would achieve is a reduction in the number of days when she should open, with a knock-on effect on hospital admissions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye, who is in her place, has passed me a letter from Mrs. Longbottom, one of her constituents. Mrs. Longbottom relates, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), that St. Augustine's nursing home has had to advise 10 of its residents that their contracts are being terminated. How many other examples are there around the county?

The net result of all this is that, despite the very substantial sums being channelled into social services in East Sussex by central Government, the funds are not being spent in the most sensible and cost-effective fashion, and residents of East Sussex will end up with a council tax that has increased by 9 per cent. in one year, or three times the rate of inflation—in other words, poorer services at greater cost. Perhaps that should be the Liberal Democrats' epitaph in East Sussex. Contrast that with the figure of £410, which was the equivalent band D tax level in the last year of a Conservative administration.

It is particularly timely, therefore, that, only yesterday, the Department of Health published "Better Value for Money in Social Services", which asks such pertinent questions as:

"Are we making deliberate, well informed decisions and priority choices about the development of our services?

Have we in place the appropriate tests to demonstrate that resources are being used to maximum effect?

What is the cost differential between placements in our own homes and residential care placements in private and voluntary homes? If our own homes' costs are higher, how do we justify the extra expense?"

With other colleagues, I eagerly await the forthcoming White Paper about the provision of social services. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Minister is in a position to trail any of its likely proposals today. We already know that one issue that will be addressed is the relationship between social services departments' providing, commissioning and regulatory roles.

In East Sussex, the present administration at county hall is characterised by a lack of leadership, a sense of drift and an organisational nightmare. That means that, despite very substantial Government funding, there is a chronic inability to deliver the care that is needed when it is needed to the local people who need it.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Simon Burns): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on his success in securing this timely debate on funding for social services in East Sussex. He performs a singularly important function on behalf of his constituents by raising this issue today.

The importance of the issue and the concerns that it is causing people in East Sussex can best be demonstrated by the fact that my right hon. Friends the Members for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury), for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), and my hon. Friends the Members for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) and for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) are present today.

I know, not only from their interventions during the debate but from the way in which they have raised issues in their constituencies, at ministerial level and through the avenues that are open to them in the House, that they are as concerned for their constituents as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne at what is going on, and the way in which a political party in this country is playing grubby political games with the most frail, vulnerable and elderly people in society.

It gives me no pleasure to say that I also have the misfortune—although, fortunately, not on the same scale as my hon. Friend—of having to face the tactics, the cheap ploys and the rather unpleasant soundbites of Liberal Democrats in my constituency. We all know the tactics, some of which were so eloquently described by my hon. Friend.

We know that Liberal Democrats have a handbook that advises their parliamentary candidates what to do. If local councillors see an issue on the agenda for which a popular

decision will be taken, Liberal Democrats start a campaign calling for it, and, lo and behold, when the decision is taken, they claim the credit, even though they had little to do with it.

My hon. Friend highlighted what has become a despicable annual game for the Liberal Democrats in this country at this time of the year, in the run-up to the budget. They say, "Let's cause some scare stories. Of course, it won't be our fault—it's the Government's fault—so let's try to score some political points out of it." They then create stories of cuts here and cuts there. They say that there is a lack of funding, but that is not based on any reality or truth. They raise fears simply to try to win votes; then they place the blame for their own inadequacies and failings on someone else.

I should like to put that into perspective by setting the record straight. I make no apology for beginning my reply to my hon. Friend's speech by quoting some impressive statistics to underline the Government's commitment to funding social services fairly, so that the elderly, the frail and the vulnerable in our society get the best deal possible. That is what government is about: providing the funds for the best services, the best care, the best provision, so that the vulnerable and those who are often confused by the political rhetoric that is dredged out of the gutter by the Liberal Democrats, can have peace of mind and security, either in their own home through a domiciliary care package or in a residential or nursing home.

At the start of the 1970s, expenditure on social services in this country was just over £243 million per annum. That increased rapidly through the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, and spending is now more than four times more in real terms than it was in 1971-72. I think that all my hon. Friends will agree that that is an extraordinary record over such a sustained period.

East Sussex council alone has budgeted to spend more than £124 million on social services this year. That is £616 for every man, woman and child in that county. It is almost four times the level of net spending on personal social services by the county council 10 years ago, and more than double its net spending at the beginning of this decade. No area of the council's business has seen such a rapid expansion in its funding from central Government.

The Government have shown their commitment to people who need social care by the provision of almost £8 billion for personal social services in the forthcoming year nationwide. The amount provided for social services in East Sussex has increased from £56 million in 1990–91 to £123 million this year, which is an increase of 81 per cent. in real terms, and is noticeably above the national average increase of 69 per cent. in real terms.

The amount provided by Government for community care has grown from £41 million in 1990–91 to £101 million this year, which is an increase of 100 per cent. in real terms. In case the Liberal Democrats do not understand that, it is 100 per cent. over and above the rate of inflation during that period. Anyone who does not accept that that is a substantial increase is, quite frankly, living in cloud cuckoo land.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Is it not entirely predictable that not one Liberal Democrat is present to hear my hon. Friend's indictment of the party's performance in East Sussex?

Mr. Burns: As usual, my hon. Friend is extraordinarily perspicacious. He will probably have noted that, seven minutes into the debate, the hon. Member for Bolton, North–East (Mr. Thurnham) ambled into the Chamber, sat down and listened to the searing indictment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne. He did not like what he heard, because he was ashamed of it, and he scuttled out fairly quickly afterwards.

It is worth pointing out that, when the Government provide a local authority with funding for personal social services, it is based on its standard spending assessment. It is up to local authorities, within their overall capping limits, to prioritise the services on which they want to concentrate more spending. A local authority can, if it wants, spend more on personal social services, education or some of the airy-fairy policies that are more akin to the demands and desires of the Liberal Democrats, even though they bear little resemblance to the desires of real people in the real world.

Mr. Waterson: Cycle paths.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend mentions cycle paths, and I can think of others.

In 1994–95, East Sussex county council underspent on its personal social services SSA by 1.2 per cent. In 1995–96, it spent over its SSA by just 1 per cent., and in 1996–97 it spent over its SSA by a mere 0.3 per cent. It is up to local councillors to take local decisions, but those figures seem small—there was even an underspend in 1994-95—given the crocodile tears they shed and the accusations, smears and scares they try to arouse in East Sussex.

The issue of special transitional grant is complicated, but let me try to put it into perspective. An SSA is set for personal social services, and above that there is the STG, which the Government introduced at the beginning of the community care programme. The STG provides additional money to fund the new community care programme and is ring-fenced, so that 85 per cent. must be spent in the thriving independent sector to protect it from the encroachment of a local authority. At the end of the year, that money goes into the baseline for the SSA, and the next year a further STG is ring-fenced.

That measure was introduced for four years, and I am sure that my hon. Friends will be delighted to know that our right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has extended the provision for a further year from April 1997. That is important. In his speech to the Association of Directors of Social Services, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health said that we see the role of local authorities as enablers, and the private sector as the providers of the services that we need for our frail and elderly people.

Mr. Waterson: Is my hon. Friend aware that a great number of dedicated independent care providers in my

[Mr. Waterson]

constituency are raring to go? They can provide residential care, respite care, domiciliary care packages, day care and the whole gamut of social services provision, but their ambitions are being blocked by the rather old-fashioned attitude of East Sussex social services.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend is right. I pay tribute to the successful, dedicated and thriving private sector, not only in his constituency but in the constituencies of my other hon. Friends. He makes an important point. I commend to East Sussex county council the paper published yesterday, "Better Value for Money in Social Services". The council should study it carefully: the questions in each chapter are not difficult, so it will be able to understand them. Let us hope that it will come up with some constructive answers to enhance its performance in that area.

I am afraid that I must disappoint my hon. Friend, because I shall not be tempted to trail or leak the White Paper that my right hon. Friend will publish shortly. However, as a titbit and an inducement, I will say that the document will be extremely interesting and important. I strongly recommend that my hon. Friends read it, and that they ensure that their constituents are familiar with its contents, because it will be a good read.

My hon. Friend referred to bed blocking. I suspect that East Sussex social services have not made much of the extra funds to be spent on priority services next year to help with bed blocking. East Sussex health authority will receive £428,000, most of which is available to meet pressures arising from delayed discharge from hospital. Those funds are intended to be used to alleviate the most serious pressures and to focus on underlying problems, and they should bring long-term benefits to my hon. Friends' constituents.

In April 1997, East Sussex is to be reorganised. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury) mentioned, the Brighton and Hove area will become a unitary authority. I should like to say in passing that the Government have increased the provision for personal social services next year nationwide by a further 5 per cent., which brings the total resources up to £8 billion. Both East Sussex county council and the new authority of Brighton and Hove will benefit as a result of that increase.

I have a great deal of sympathy with my right hon. Friend and his constituents. I fear that his suspicions about the way in which the Labour local authority will run services may well prove correct.

I have sought to explain the vast amounts of money that have been made available for personal social services, but how that money is used to provide the best service is equally important. Social services departments are big business with large budgets. It is crucial that they obtain the best value for money to provide the best service.

It is telling that a local authority which complains that it does not have enough money to provide a service has advised me that the cost to a prospective elderly resident of an in-house placement in one of its homes is £355 a week, whereas the maximum cost of an independent residential sector place purchased by East Sussex is £203 a week. The difference is a staggering £152 a week, which has to be met by local council tax payers.

Last year, East Sussex had about 600 residents in its own homes. That represents a potential saving of almost £5 million, if my mathematics is correct. That high-cost difference is sadly not unique to East Sussex. When a local authority is complaining that it does not have enough money, I cannot understand how it can justify spending about £152 a person a week extra just by placing them in its own homes. There are similar problems with domiciliary care. By being competitive, the private sector can and will charge less, as well as incorporating its management costs into the overall charge.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne once again for bringing this important debate to the House, and for representing the interests of his constituents against a local authority controlled by a party that has always been most comfortable when it is scrubbing around in the gutter with its scares and smears. I hope that all my right hon. and hon. Friends will use their undoubted talents to get the message across.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): We now move to the final topic this morning.

Farm and Countryside Enhancement (Northern Ireland)

1.30 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this matter in the House. I thank the Minister, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), for attending the debate to respond on behalf of his ministerial colleague Baroness Denton, who is in charge of the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland.

The farm and countryside enhancement scheme is the most bizarre scheme that I have ever seen coming out of any Department in Northern Ireland. Its acronym is FACES; its result is bound to be red faces in the Department of Agriculture. The purpose of the scheme was to grant-aid for certain environmental improvements in the rural countryside of Northern Ireland, and, according to the press release, it

"provides an excellent opportunity for the farming community to contribute to the development of rural tourism, protect wildlife and preserve the Province's heritage."

The scheme is most unusual, because it was announced by press release on Monday 27 January and closed by press release at 5 pm on Thursday 30 January. The notice of closure appeared on the Friday, so the scheme commenced on 28 January, was ended by press release two days later, and lasted for three working days.

Advertisements inviting applications for the scheme first appeared on 1 February, two days after the scheme had closed. During the period, some of the agricultural offices throughout the six counties that open on a temporary or part-time basis were closed. Applications had to be made to the Department of Agriculture in Derry, so they could not possibly have arrived before the scheme was closed. There must have been an enormous courier service running from various parts of the north to the offices in Derry.

More strange and fundamental is the fact that qualification for this agricultural scheme is based on the incidence of terrorism. What that has to do with agricultural and environmental improvement must be beyond the ken of any sane man or woman.

Under the scheme, according to the press release, assistance would be provided in

"District Council areas which have suffered most from terrorist violence to encourage the adoption of environmentally sensitive countryside management and thereby maintain, improve and protect the landscape and habitat of the countryside."

Does that mean that, if one area has suffered more terrorist activity than its neighbour it can benefit from the agricultural grant scheme, but areas that have suffered less are cut out? Are we saying that communities that have striven over the past 25 years to keep terrorism at bay, keep the paramilitaries out of their communities and encourage good community relationships, should be penalised and completely excluded from the scheme? I do not think that there is any logic in that.

Funding for the scheme, which is not huge—I think that it is about £4.5 million—comes from the peace and reconciliation fund. I must ask once again whether landscape enhancement improves community relations. Does the improvement of wildlife habitats enhance community relations? I suppose that that depends on one's interpretation of wildlife in Northern Ireland. Does the improvement of water quality enhance reconciliation and peace in Northern Ireland?

The scheme is a ludicrous one of the first order. It includes such things as the preservation of traditional gates in fields and the thatching of houses, yet there are very few thatched houses in Northern Ireland. Such is the predication on which the scheme has been built.

Twelve of the 26 district councils have been totally excluded from the scheme. Is not that in itself an in-built injustice? They are excluded because they have not suffered sufficient terrorist incidents. Is not that a crazy basis on which to allocate public grant aid? How does one measure the incidence of terrorism? I do not want to enter a sickening argument, but I must ask whether one death in one district is equated with 10 knee-cappings in another, or found to be less worthy under the scheme? Getting into such areas is very peculiar.

My constituency is partly in and partly out of the scheme, but I hope that I am talking for the entire rural community in Northern Ireland that has been excluded by the manner and basis of the scheme. My home district of Down has suffered some of the greatest tragedies and massacres during the terrorism of the past 25 years, yet it has striven mightily against retaliation to retain good community relations, which is acknowledged. What is its reward? Exclusion from the scheme. There is no real justification for that.

The city of Belfast is included in this rural environmental improvement scheme, yet there is perhaps one farm in the entire environs of Belfast district council. There is, of course, a high incidence of terrorism. Is that a qualification for the improvement of ditches, water supplies and agricultural heritage in Belfast? Why does Belfast qualify but not other areas such as the conurbation of Craigavon and the extended urban sprawl of Lisburn, even though they include rural communities that can benefit? It is nonsense. I hope that the Minister will take cognisance of the facts.

I should like to prove my point. Many of the areas of highest deprivation are in the areas to which I have referred. The farmers who reside in some of the electoral wards of Down, such as Tollymore, are considered eligible for help under other schemes and are considered to have the highest level of deprivation.

No cognisance has been taken of the Robson statistics, which highlight the multiple nature of deprivation, and in every other respect are used as a basis on which to go forward by the peace and reconciliation fund—the very fund supplying grant aid under the rural scheme. The parts under both the old and new less-favoured areas qualify on the basis of special need, yet they are specifically excluded from the rural scheme.

I am asking the Minister to consider seriously the flaw in the decision on how the scheme should be administered, and the grave injustice that occurred as a consequence of the time frame. It is remarkable that 2,532 applications were made within that time frame, which was published on 28 January and closed at 5 pm two days later. I subscribe to the argument current in Northern Ireland that details were leaked before the announcement, and that certain people were made cognisant of what was going to happen. They took advantage of that, which meant that other applicants did not have a level playing field.

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

It is obscene to use terrorism statistics as a basis for making an agricultural grant. I can think of no argument to justify that. It is also wrong and unjust that many areas are excluded from the scheme on that basis. That wrong is compounded by the manner in which the advertisements were made and withdrawn. The notice stating the closing date could not have been published until the next day. That administrative nightmare has caused grave injustices.

I have tried to address the issues honestly. My office and many others have been inundated with complaints about the injustice of what has happened under the scheme—the basis on which it was predicated, the manner in which it was administered, and the suggestion, believed by many, that there was foul play in that administration. That is why I call it the red faces scheme.

I ask the Minister to take on board five points to address to the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. First, an inquiry is needed into the administration of the scheme. I am not looking for a full-blown judicial public inquiry, but the issue needs to be addressed seriously. Secondly, the late applicants should be admitted. Even with the 5 pm deadline on 30 January not notified, a further 1,612 applications were made that will not be considered. Thirdly, funding should be found in the near future to reopen the scheme, so as to address the injustice perpetrated on those who were given no information about the scheme and were not able to apply.

Fourthly, the basis on which the grant aid scheme for rural improvement is made should be amended sensibly. There can be no logic in basing it on terrorism. That is an obscene concept, which should never have been brought in. Fifthly, when the inquiry takes place, and if the scheme can be reopened, proper notice and advice should be given to all farmers in Northern Ireland, so that they have a reasonable opportunity to make a submission. They know that their success depends their submission and the funds available, but there should be an even playing field for every small farmer.

1.43 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) on securing this debate and on the manner in which he has presented this important subject. I notice that the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) is also in his place, and is taking an interest.

Before going into the details, I shall touch on the five points that the hon. Gentleman raised. He asked for an inquiry into the way in which the scheme was devised and set up. As he understands, that is a matter for my noble Friend, Baroness Denton of Wakefield. I shall certainly draw his remarks to her attention. The need for an inquiry depends on how the scheme was set up, which I shall deal with in a moment.

The hon. Gentleman also suggests the admission of late applicants. One of the difficulties, to which he has already alluded, is the fact that the scheme is inevitably limited by the amount of cash available. I am sure that he will wish to consider that. He suggests finding other sources of funding. Drawing an extra pound from me, as the Minister responsible for finance, is, alas, very difficult. Whether my noble Friend is able to find extra capacity in her tight budget is a matter for her. The hon. Gentleman also asked for proper advice and other matters to be considered.

To help the hon. Gentleman, I shall deal with some of the details of the scheme. The farm and countryside enhancement scheme was formulated by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland as part of its portfolio of schemes under the European Union special support programme for peace and reconciliation. That programme was designed to help the areas of Northern Ireland that had suffered most from violence over the previous 25 years.

Herein lies the difficulty, which I think the hon. Gentleman will readily comprehend. He reproved the Government for the test of violence. It is not within the gift of the United Kingdom Government to change that requirement, because the scheme was devised under the European Union peace and reconciliation programme, which specifically targeted those areas that had suffered most from violence. That is a requirement of the peace scheme. The Government's hands are therefore tied: any scheme devised under that programme had to be targeted to meet that requirement.

The farm and countryside enhancement scheme was targeted on the basis of a unique violence indicator, which combined Royal Ulster Constabulary regional statistics on violence with a deprivation index. That was possible on a district council level, and, as a result, 14 district council areas became eligible for the scheme.

It is acknowledged that other district council areas, and areas within other district councils, have also suffered from violence. However, the programme has a specific targeting requirement, and it was not possible to open the scheme to the whole of Northern Ireland. The scheme is additional to the range of grants and subsidies available throughout Northern Ireland through a number of national and European funded programmes to support the farming community.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that the scheme is known as FACES, although my face is not particularly red as I account for it. It provides financial incentives and training for farmers in countryside management, and has the overall objective of enhancing rural tourism through environmental improvement. Eligible farmers will be involved in landscape enhancement, protection and restoration of heritage features, water quality improvements, innovative agri-improvement projects and a rural training programme. Department of Agriculture officials will carry out a farm audit for each applicant and agree a plan of action. The financial incentives are attractive, at 60 to 80 per cent. grant rate, but considerable commitment is required from participating farmers in their role as custodians of the rural environment.

The hon. Member for South Down mentioned the publicity for the scheme, and its early closure. The scheme was opened on 27 January with a press release from my noble Friend Baroness Denton of Wakefield, who is Minister of Agriculture in Northern Ireland. The announcement followed a long period of scheme development, during which farming and environmental interest groups were extensively consulted. That consultation may have given rise to the rumour mill that gave advance notice of the scheme, but the views and many of the ideas put forward by those groups were included in the formulation of the scheme.

As the hon. Gentleman told the House, the scheme was announced by the normal press release, which was followed by radio and television coverage on 28 and 29 January. Staff in the Department of Agriculture at all six county agricultural offices received 184 applications on 28 January, 897 on 29 January, and 1,451 on 30 January, giving a total of 2,532.

By 30 January, it was clear that the volume of applications could easily exhaust the available budget of £4.25 million. It was, unfortunately, necessary to close the scheme immediately and without notice. Any time extension would have created insurmountable financial difficulty for administration of the scheme, because it was limited by the amount of money that was available.

Some 740 further applications were received and date-stamped on 31 January, but it was made clear to applicants that the scheme had been closed. Given that 2,532 applications have already been received, it is highly unlikely that any of the 740 can be considered for assistance. I appreciate that many people will be disappointed that they have not been able to take advantage of the scheme. With a finite budget, that was unavoidable.

I assure the hon. Member that all applications will be carefully scrutinised by Department of Agriculture officials to ensure their authenticity and eligibility, and to ensure that there is no duplication with other schemes. Only plans that make a tangible contribution to the aims of the scheme, and which are completed satisfactorily, will be approved and funded by the scheme. The scheme will be closely and continuously monitored and evaluated.

While I acknowledge the disappointment felt by some, I am pleased by the uptake, and I look forward to seeing the results of the scheme for one of Northern Ireland's greatest assets—its rural environment.

Mr. McGrady: I appreciate that the Minister is trying to be helpful, but he has not addressed the injustice created by the situation. The scheme is predicated on terrorism. If that is the only criterion for the allocation of the resources for peace and reconciliation, the 12 additional district councils cannot qualify for that funding. The announcement was made on 28 January and the scheme closed on 30 January, and it was promoted by a lovely, glossy magazine. Within that time scale, how could that magazine be distributed and understood, and how could applications be made? Is the magazine now just waste paper? Who received it, and when?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his further points. Extensive consultation about the nature of the scheme was carried out by the Department of Agriculture, but he has rightly identified some of the shortcomings of the scheme. He also mentioned the leaflet that has been printed, published and distributed.

The hon. Gentleman called for an inquiry into the scheme. I undertake to draw his remarks to the attention of my noble Friend Baroness Denton, and I will seek to ensure that she inquires into the matter carefully.

The scheme was limited by cash, and it is always difficult to administer such schemes. There have to be some criteria that are understood publicly and to which people can respond with confidence. The Department of Agriculture, through its consultative arrangements, sought to achieve that, but the hon. Gentleman has a point about how the scheme was publicised by the press release and radio and television coverage.

I also understand the frustration that people felt when they realised that their applications would not be examined because they had not been made before the cut-off point. However, I cannot promise to reverse the scheme, because we have commitments to those who successfully applied.

I will invite my noble Friend Baroness Denton to consider the methodology used to set up the scheme and the lessons that can be learned to improve such schemes in the future. There may be implications for European peace and reconciliation funding which, by its nature, ties the hands of the United Kingdom Government. The Government are limited in their ability to spend that money, which originally came from the taxpayers of the United Kingdom, practically and sensibly for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland in the special circumstances they face.

I take the hon. Member's comments seriously. They were honourably meant, and clearly presented. I will ensure that the matter is pursued in the way I have described.

It being two minutes to Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Sanctions (Libya)

1. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from British firms about the effect on British industry of sanctions against Libya. [15021]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): We have had representations from various British firms involved in major projects and general trade with Libya, but they have not necessarily been directly related to the UN sanctions.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister take advantage of the presence in London today of Madeleine Albright to raise with her the basic issue—the cause of all the trouble—the UN sanctions, in the light of the fact that James T. Thurman, the forensic expert, is now accused by his own colleagues of fabricating forensic evidence? Should we not talk to the Americans about this?

Mr. Taylor: The President of the Board of Trade has no plans to see the American Secretary of State in the immediate future but there are meetings with American diplomatic representatives from time to time. On the next occasion, the President will certainly bear in mind the points that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that Gaddafi's regime is one of the most evil in the world, and has sought to destabilise the middle east and attack western democracies? Should not we deny it the means of prosperity and the means of our own destruction?

Mr. Taylor: I would certainly shortlist Gaddafi's regime as among the most wicked. As my hon. Friend knows, the United Kingdom has kept scrupulously to the United Nations position. The United Nations is not content with the American position, which goes further. We reject the United States' attempt to impose sanctions on its allies in respect of trade that is lawful in the eyes of the UN.

Manufacturing Investment

2. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the Engineering Employers Federation to discuss manufacturing investment. [15022]

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Energy (Mr. Richard Page): Ministers at the DTI have frequent contact with the EEF to discuss a wide range of issues, including investment.

Mr. Connarty: Does the Minister accept that the figures for the last quarter of 1996 published by the EEF show that investment in manufacturing industries was 16 per cent. lower than for the same quarter of 1995? Does he accept that we have still not returned to the investment figures for 1989 and 1990? Does he agree that the Government have failed manufacturing and left it weak, undernourished and starved of adequate incentives for investment?

Mr. Page: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would give a *fuller picture. Why does he not say that the EEF* expects record sales in 1997? Why does he not say that fixed investment, which is the key source of demand for engineering products, will rise by some 5 per cent? Why does he not quote the Confederation of British Industry, which says that manufacturing investment will rise by 8 per cent. this year and next? That is good news.

Mr. Sykes: What does my hon. Friend think will happen to manufacturing investment if the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) ever has the reins of power? What does he think will happen to unemployment? Does he agree that we shall endure the agonising unemployment levels that are now splitting Germany apart? The right hon. Gentleman says that he will never be isolated in Europe; the German Chancellor will have him for breakfast.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend is right. We have only to consider the fact that manufacturing employment in this country has increased by 130,000 since the end of 1993, whereas unemployment in Germany now stands at 4.6 million. It is obvious which Government have the right policies.

Dr. Howells: Does the Minister concede the fact that the skills shortages currently afflicting manufacturing industry in many areas of the country are a great restraint on investment in the future, and on any confidence that the manufacturing sector may have? When will he do something about that? Is it not a crime, given that so many young people who now languish on the dole could do with those skills and the appropriate education to staff up our manufacturing sector? When will the Minister do something to sort out that bunch of under-performers in the TECs and training centres in our colleges, who swap acronyms, jargon and conferences instead of getting on with the job of pumping some energy and motivation into job training and creation?

Mr. Page: Far be it from me partially to agree with the hon. Gentleman—but I do. He happens to have omitted the fact that our manufacturing productivity has risen by 80 per cent. since 1979, and is going very much in the right direction. I agree, however, that we need engineering skills if we are to drive the country forward more effectively, which is why I am glad that in 1994 we launched the Action for Engineering initiative, which has several facets, one of which is to encourage the development of engineers and the spread of best practice. Add to that our encouragement of modern apprenticeships, and I think that we are doing the right things to reduce the skills gap that the hon. Gentleman correctly identified.

Mr. Quentin Davies: How can placing a new discriminatory tax on any firm or sector have any consequence other than to depress investment in that firm or sector? Would not a windfall tax inevitably, as night follows day, reduce investment in the successful British

utilities that it would attack, thereby reducing those companies' growth prospects and capacity for wealth creation and employment generation in the future?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend is right. Since privatisation, BT has invested £29 billion. A windfall tax would not help that investment programme, but it would have an impact on shareholders, and eventually on prices and on the country's competitiveness.

Regional Support

3. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from organisations in the northern and north-west regions on the levels of support available to help industry. [15024]

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Greg Knight): I and other DTI Ministers regularly receive representations from organisations about the level of support available to help industry, including that in the northern and north-west regions.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What is the point of maintaining a regime of regional assistance to draw manufacturing industry from all over the world to set up new plant in areas such as west Cumbria when the Foreign Office, in the form of the Foreign Secretary, is saying that Britain should not enter a single currency, thus undermining the strategy of confidence-building designed to attract industry to the United Kingdom? Surely there is an inconsistency at the heart of government. Why do Ministers not get their act together, so as to avoid undermining the strategy on which the areas that many of us represent are utterly reliant?

Mr. Knight: In January 1996, unemployment in the hon. Gentleman's area was 11.5 per cent. This year it is 10.4 per cent.—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I did not ask about that.

Mr. Knight: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was about to stand up and welcome the fall in unemployment, which was caused partly by the success of the regional selective assistance scheme. What would damage British industry and destroy British jobs is implementation of the social chapter and the minimum wage.

Science Base

4. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures his Department is taking to promote the United Kingdom's science base. [15025]

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): The science budget has risen by 17 per cent. in real terms since 1986–87. My Department has a vigorous programme to promote the understanding of science and an appreciation of the importance of the science base in national competitiveness and quality of life. Key activities at the moment are the Year of Engineering Success and the next National Week of Science, starting on 14 March.

Mr. Evennett: I congratulate my hon. Friend on maintaining the science budget for the forthcoming year, despite the restraints on public expenditure, and on his work to promote science throughout the country. Has he any figures or evidence to show how well science is being taught and what developments are being made in our universities?

Mr. Taylor: The teaching of science in our universities is crucial, and I have been heartened by the number of universities that I have visited that have demonstrated that teaching is alive and well and that the concept of scholarship is very much to the fore. We are probably the most cost-effective university research community in the world: 1 per cent. of the world's population producing 6 per cent. of the world's scientific research output, 8 per cent. of its publications and 9 per cent. of its citations.

Mr. Ingram: The Minister's facts are interesting, but they fly in the face of reality. How does he answer the criticisms of companies such as SmithKline Beecham, which pointed out in a letter to me today that the United Kingdom is the only major Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country that is showing a fall in total research and development spend as a percentage of gross domestic product? Who should we believe is telling the truth: companies such as SmithKline Beecham, or the Minister?

Mr. Taylor: I do not think that there is any doubt that I am telling the truth, because I am speaking in the House and giving the figures. I see that Opposition Members are kindly nodding in agreement with that statement. I would never criticise SmithKline Beecham, which is an important company in this country, but there are clearly differences of emphasis.

I have talked to George Poste, the head of research at SmithKline Beecham, who acknowledges some of the difficulties that the company faces in ensuring that even its internal researchers keep up with the equipment demands faced by the pharmaceutical industry. It is inevitable that universities will face similar equipment demands. That is precisely why we targeted our research equipment exercise during the past year. We intend to do that again, bringing in £50 million this year, closely targeted on our best research universities, and SmithKline Beecham has been making a positive input into both the formulation and the delivery of those policies.

Mr. Key: Does my hon. Friend agree that the science base in this country, in both the private and the public sector, is thriving, taking on the world, and beating it? Is he aware of the great success of the special health authority, the centre for applied microbiology and research at Porton Down, which in its new incarnation is taking on American companies and is second to none as an international operator in the field in which it dominates a large slice of world action?

Mr. Taylor: I am happy to confirm my hon. Friend's comments, especially about microbiology. The importance of the microtechnologies in this country, including nanotechnology, which is of an order of dimension smaller, is well evidenced by the support that we give. A BBC 2 programme the other week gave the wrong figures: we have spent £135 million on nanotechnology in the past five years, and this year alone

we have injected a further £25 million into such schemes, including some by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

High-technology Sector

5. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about support for newly established firms in the high-technology sector. [15026]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department recognises the vital importance of such firms to the current and future competitiveness of the economy. We therefore support a range of measures to assist them to grow, including the small firms merit award for research and technology scheme and the provision of innovation and technology counsellors in business links, as well as initiatives to assist firms in specific industry sectors such as biotechnology.

Mrs. Campbell: Does the Minister agree that, given that only 6 per cent. of the loans under the small firms loan guarantee scheme go to technology-based businesses, he should be working with the banks, as the Labour party is doing, to double the loans under the scheme by the end of the next Parliament?

Mr. Taylor: I am happy to reassure the hon. Lady, who has kindly agreed with me, that I agree with her; but we will achieve that aim by the end of this Parliament, because we are in the process of inviting offers for the small loans guarantee scheme from other companies that are more familiar with dealing with high-tech companies.

Only the weekend before last, Save British Science and my Department jointly sponsored a conference on bridging the funding gap, which had the venture capitalists talking animatedly with us about how we could encourage finance to go into the smaller companies. I assure the hon. Lady that the debate is alive and well and many of the policies are being applied.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend agree that companies setting up in increasingly important human genetic science need a clear ethical framework in which to operate? In view of yesterday's press conference by the Association of British Insurers, will he ask the new Human Genetics Advisory Commission to look at the implications of genetic testing for the insurance industry to see whether further guidelines should be published to encourage the acceptance of genetic screening, which is important to the future of public health?

Mr. Taylor: I can announce to the House that the first full meeting of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission will be held next Thursday. It is an independent commission under the vice-chancellor of the university of Nottingham. It is up to the commission to set its agenda, but I would be extremely surprised if insurance was not one of the subjects that it covered early on. I welcome the announcement by the Association of British Insurers, in the sense that I want the debate to come into the public domain. Genetics is a great force for good in terms of our understanding of human disease and our ability to prevent it. I do not want there to be any misunderstandings about the involvement of insurance in genetics, and I want to encourage a wide public debate about it.

Manufacturing Production

6. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the change in manufacturing production in the latest quarter relative to (a) the last quarter of 1973 and (b) the last quarter of 1989. [15027]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): In the final quarter of 1996, manufacturing output reached a new high and was 2¼ per cent. higher than in the final quarter of 1989 and 8 per cent. higher than in the final quarter of 1973. However, between 1973 and 1979 manufacturing output fell by 5 per cent.

Mr. Mitchell: Is the Secretary of State worried that the increases in output since 1973 and 1989 are so pathetically small, as every other advanced industrial country has had a much bigger rate of increase during that period? Is it not even more worrying that we are at present supposed to be enjoying a boom, but manufacturing production increased by only 0.5 per cent. in 1996? Manufacturing firms are not investing because they have no confidence in the Government, and now—threatened with an overvalued pound—company reports are beginning to show losses and reduced profits. Does not that bode ill, as the worst effects will come through only in a few months' time?

Mr. Lang: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman heard my earlier answer. Manufacturing output is now at an all-time high and this country is manufacturing and exporting more than ever before. The figure is up by 8 per cent. since 1973—and it would be a lot higher but for the fact that, under the last Labour Government, manufacturing did not rise at all, but fell by 5 per cent. We are going through not a boom, as the hon. Gentleman put it, but a period of sustained and sustainable growth which is spreading manufacturing employment—up by 125,000 in the past three years—and prosperity throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that improvements in manufacturing productivity have played a significant part in our economic success, particularly since 1992? Does he further agree that, if we were voluntarily to impose the burdens of the social chapter on our industry, we would experience the high levels of unemployment currently being borne by France and Germany, which we want no part of?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Manufacturing productivity has increased dramatically since 1979, and the rate of growth in productivity has been the highest in the G7. We have been closing the gap with Germany and France, which widened under the last Labour Government. He is also absolutely right to say that imposing the European social model on our workplace would damage not just productivity, but output and growth in the economy. We would experience—as we did under the last Labour Government—a much less satisfactory manufacturing performance.

Mr. Hoon: Is it not clear from the Secretary of State's answers that any longer-term consideration of Britain's

relative economic performance compared with our immediate EU competitors demonstrates the underlying weakness of the British economy under successive Conservative Governments? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in terms of real gross domestic product growth since 1990, Britain lags behind the EU average and well behind the United States?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman seems unaware of the fact that this country's economy is growing faster than those of the rest of Europe this year, and is expected to grow faster next. He may also be unaware that the volume of our exports has been growing faster than those of France and Germany since this Government came to power—as has productivity—and that the productivity gap widened under the last Labour Government. With exports doubled since 1979, and up by a third since this recovery began, the British economy is in better shape than any other economy in Europe.

Mr. Garnier: Is my right hon. Friend aware that manufacturers in the east midlands, particularly in my constituency, are enjoying huge order books, both for long-term and short-term orders, and that their opposite numbers in the European Union are unable to employ people to do overtime because of the restrictions that are imposed there? Would he care to compare the miserable picture painted by Opposition Members with the good news that we hear day by day in our constituencies?

Mr. Lang: My hon. and learned Friend is right. Nothing illustrates that fact better than the comparison of unemployment figures. In this country, unemployment has been falling for the past four years and now stands at 6.5 per cent, whereas in Europe it has been rising: in Germany, it is well over 11 per cent; in France, it is over 12 per cent; and, in Spain, it is over 20 per cent. That is the price that they are paying for the European social model.

European Airbus

7. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate his Department has made of the percentage of total European Airbus production work currently undertaken in the United Kingdom. [15028]

Mr. Greg Knight: The latest available figures from the European Commission, which include both aircraft and spacecraft production, show that in 1994 the UK's share of European Union aerospace production was 33 per cent.

Mr. Pike: The Minister will recognise that Airbus, in particular, is important not only to the United Kingdom economy, British Aerospace and its contractors, but to the many people in this country who supply aerospace parts to the other European partners? That work is particularly crucial in Lancashire. Will he ensure that, in the restructuring at Airbus, the companies that are competing for work in Europe and the subcontractors to the other partners are not precluded from competing in the years ahead?

Mr. Knight: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. He has raised an interesting and important issue. The restructuring of the Airbus consortium is essential if it is to be able to compete in world markets. That is something that we are encouraging and pushing ahead.

Mr. Atkins: Is not Airbus one of the smartest companies in the aerospace operation, and producing some of the best turned out aircraft, which sell around the world? Does my right hon. Friend recognise the importance of Airbus not only to the country, but to Lancashire in particular, in relation to British Aerospace, Lucas and Rolls-Royce, complemented by the Rolls-Royce factories in and around his constituency, which have recently done so much to obtain success on Airbus orders from, for example, the United Arab Emirates?

Mr. Knight: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The British Government recognise—as do I—that Airbus is a world leader. We want it to continue to be one. Indeed, Rolls-Royce will play an important part in the future not only of Airbus, but of aircraft production throughout the world.

Mr. Clapham: Is the Minister aware that, in 1993, the Trade and Industry Committee studied the British aerospace industry and recommended that the Government assess the research and technology requirements of the industry and support the national strategic technology acquisition plan? Since then, nothing has been done, and the research and development that was being carried out on undercarriages, for example, has gone to Canada. The industry has now put forward a new strategic plan, called the foresight plan. Will the Minister undertake to carry out an urgent inquiry and support the new plan? Is he prepared to take on board support for the new developments that are taking place in the aircraft industry and the idea of the research programme?

Mr. Knight: I do not accept all of that. The hon. Gentleman said that nothing is being done, but that is not the case. Since 1979, we have given £1.25 billion in launch aid to the aerospace industry and maintained—we continue to maintain it—the civil aircraft research and demonstration programme, which is involved with research and development.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the foresight action programme, which is a suggestion by the industry that it should put forward £40 million and the Government should put forward an equal amount from public funds. That requires discussion across Government Departments. Those discussions have not yet been finalised. An announcement will be made in due course. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that nothing is being done. I hope that he will join me in noting the comments of the technology foresight defence and aerospace panel, which said that industry could and should do more about investment in this area.

Exports

8. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent measures his Department has taken to promote United Kingdom exports. [15029]

Mr. Lang: Through the Overseas Trade Services organisation, my Department and the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office provide the best ever package of information, advice and practical assistance to British companies. I am glad to say that British exports now stand at an all-time record level.

Mr. Banks: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Will he confirm that the Government have put in place other substantial measures to help British exporters win contracts overseas? Does he agree that it is important that British diplomats abroad are concerned not only with good diplomacy, but with continuing to bat hard to help British companies win export orders, which secure British jobs at home?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff are engaged in commercial work in overseas posts in 140 markets to help our exporters. My Department is also active, with many staff covering nearly 200 markets. Last year, we helped 10,000 individuals to go on overseas trade missions and 23,000 firms to take part in trade fairs.

Mr. Barry Jones: Is not sterling hopelessly overvalued? What will the Government do about that? Why do they not move to help British industry?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman seems to be unaware that British exports are at a record level and are generally expected to reach a higher record next year. Exports have doubled since the last Labour Government were in power in 1979; since 1979, they have been increasing at twice the rate at which they grew under Labour.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: While we all accept that the value of the pound influences the competitiveness of our exports, does not manufacturing industry want, when exporting, a stable economy, low inflation, low interest rates and a Government who understand industry? Is not that what my right hon. Friend can do to help our exporters, more than anything else? Is that not confirmed by the fact many overseas industrialists, including those in Europe, believe that Britain is the best place to come and do business?

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that his remarks will do more to help British industry than will those of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who, we are told, is in America talking Britain down.

Mr. Shore: The Secretary of State is getting complacent. It is, I hope, true that our exports are at a record level, but are not our imports at a record level, too? Are we not running a trade deficit this year, as we have for the past six years?

Mr. Lang: The right hon. Gentleman should be aware that many of our exports are re-exported imports and, as such, contain a substantial proportion of imports. Our current account is close to balance and at its strongest for a decade. Provided that we stick with the policies that are delivering that success, we have nothing to fear about our balance of payments.

Mr. Lidington: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the appalling unemployment in Germany and France will make life more difficult for British exporters who try to sell into those important markets? Would it not be the worst possible service to British exporters for a Government to seek to impose on Britain the job-destroying measures that have wrought such havoc on continental Europe?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. It is significant that Britain exports more per head than Japan, the United States, France or Germany. It is by keeping labour markets flexible and lightening the burden on business that we have been able to secure that result. The most damaging thing that could happen to our exporters would be for them to face the social chapter and the European social model that the Labour party wishes to impose.

Mr. Bell: May I assure the House and those who watch this programme on their televisions that the future Labour Government will do as much as and more for our exports than the present Government. We will improve our export position and have a better position on our balance of payments and trade; we will show who is better able to govern the country.

Will the President of the Board of Trade take the opportunity to congratulate the World Trade Organisation on the multilateral agreement to open the world's telecommunications market? Is that not the way for our future trading arrangements to proceed? Will he give as much support to the opening of negotiations on financial services that begin in March, which will also be of great benefit to our export community?

Mr. Lang: I certainly share the sentiments expressed in the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I congratulate those responsible on securing that extremely satisfactory result, for which the British Government have also worked hard over the past three years. It will be of immense value, with £20 billion—worth of additional business for this country. It is part of our free trade agenda, which, sadly, we do not share with the Labour party. On the question of the Labour party's prospects of producing a satisfactory environment for our exporters, I prefer to listen to the words of the Labour peer, Labour's economics guru, Lord Desai, who said in *The Sun* today:

"Labour's biggest obstacle is the economy. It is in great shape. There is steady growth and low inflation. Compared to Germany and France, it looks the best economy in Europe."

Mr. Dover: Will my right hon. Friend accept the grateful thanks of the construction industry, which pays tribute to the efforts of the export promoters—on secondment from the private sector—and to the able leadership shown by his team of Ministers in various trade missions around the world? Those efforts have led to billions of pounds of exports for the British construction industry and the highest volume of exports of bricks.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. In addition to the trade missions and trade fairs I mentioned earlier, last year 21,000 United Kingdom participants in overseas events were assisted. It remains my purpose and that of Ministers in my Department to continue to support the export effort in every way we can.

Firework Safety

9. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress of his review of firework safety regulations. [15030]

Mr. John M. Taylor: As an initial response to the review, I introduced regulations in December that prohibit the supply of aerial shells to the public. I hope soon to be able to announce my overall response to my Department's discussion document.

In the meantime, I should like to report that the total number of firework injuries in Great Britain last firework season was 1,233—a reduction of 19 per cent. on the previous year. I shall place those figures in the Library.

Mr. Burden: I thank the Minister for having responded positively to repeated calls from the Opposition to introduce a ban on aerial shells. He mentioned a figure of about 1,200 injuries; those shells were responsible for two deaths in the past year. Is he aware that the temporary ban will be welcomed by reputable firework manufacturers, and that some on the fringes of the firework industry are seeking to get round the ban? What monitoring system has he put in place to ensure that the ban is effective? When will he introduce a national training scheme to ensure that aerial shells are available only to those certified competent to use them?

Mr. Taylor: I did not respond to Labour when I took action at the end of last year; I responded to a thorough-going consultation that I initiated.

Voluntary training has an important role to play in encouraging the safe use of fireworks. Trading standards officers will have my full support in their surveillance work.

Sir Irvine Patnick: Many people present for this programme will recollect that it used to be called Question Time—I do not know whether Labour Front Benchers have had a new idea. I come from the old school of sparklers and catherine wheels; the worst thing we had was bangers.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: It is a bit of a damp squib.

Madam Speaker: Order. I want to hear the jokes, too, but I cannot.

Sir Irvine Patnick: It is rare that one is heckled from one's own side of the House.

I hope that, after the consultations, the enjoyment that some people have had in this theatre, programme or Chamber will not be stopped and that, through legislation, powers will be given to local authorities to control the sale of certain types of firework that should never have been imported into this country.

Mr. Taylor: In the spirit of that question, I shall content myself by saying that, in my experience, sparklers can be more dangerous than bangers.

Publicly Owned Utilities (Investment)

10. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the amount of investment currently being made by the formerly publicly owned utilities. [15031]

Mr. Page: Since privatisation, managers have been free to set investment at the levels needed to secure long-term benefits, while responding to competitive and regulatory pressures. That is contributing to a sharp increase in efficiency, to the benefit of consumers.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he believe that the investment being made by the utilities is creating real British jobs in our economy? What does he think would happen if the Government of the day decided to take £10 billion out of that investment programme and put it into make-work schemes? Would that destroy those real jobs, as has happened around the world when those failed policies have been tried?

Mr. Page: The Government firmly oppose a windfall tax on the grounds that it would be very hard to establish on a fair and non-hybrid basis. I have to tell my hon. Friend and the House that this is not a windfall tax—it is not free. It is an old-fashioned smash and grab—in modern parlance, a ram raid—and it will bring only higher prices for pensioners, while at the same time bringing them lower private pensions. It will be a double whammy.

Mr. Battle: I remind the Minister that no less a body than the Institute of Directors has said that, in its view, the utilities have spare cash, and that the impact of any windfall tax would be insignificant. If he is satisfied with the levels of investment in the privatised utilities, will he explain why registered customer complaints against water companies have increased by nearly 90 per cent. and against the former British Gas by more than 100 per cent.? The Government's own former Energy Minister, within weeks of resigning, told the Select Committee on Trade and Industry that regulation needed overhauling because of high profits and lower service. What are the Government going to do about stopping service levels declining further—or can we expect only inaction as usual from the Government?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman obviously has no experience of business whatsoever. I remind him that, before privatisation, the taxpayer in this country had to put his hand in his pocket to subsidise those state activities; now those same state activities give £2.6 billion in corporation tax every year to the Exchequer. A heavy windfall tax will no doubt cause a dip in those figures—it will be a treble whammy. As regards the hon. Gentleman's remarks about standards of service, I refer him to what has happened with British Telecom—for example, 95 per cent. of phone boxes are in operation, whereas only 75 per cent. were in operation when the company was run by the state.

Sir Roger Moate: Do not the shareholders of those companies include small investors, many pension funds and many foreign investors? Would not Labour's proposed windfall tax inflict serious damage not only on

all those investors, but on Britain's international reputation as a place to invest and that does not normally engage in retrospective legislation or selective, politically motivated taxation?

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. At present, this country is doing exceedingly well from inward investment. We are getting the lion's share of investment in the European Union—everyone is investing in this country. What a message the Labour party is sending to prospective inward investors: "Be careful if you invest in Britain, because we might impose a retrospective windfall tax upon you."

Public Sector Research Establishments

11. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement of the Government's prior options review of public sector research establishments; and if he will list the cost of the exercise to (a) his Department and (b) the establishments concerned. [15032]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced the completion of the 1996 programme of reviews on 29 January 1997. The results will strengthen the country's science base. My Department incurred costs of about £75,000, and the overall cost of the reviews is estimated to be £1.5 million.

Mrs. Wise: Why will the Minister not accept that the real cost is £4 million, including the examination of the royal observatories? How does he quantify the costs to the research establishments of damaged morale, insecurity and wasted energy? Why do the Government not accept that those public sector research establishments perform essentially public functions, such as the public health laboratories that protect us from epidemics? When will he realise that they must be relieved of the constant threat of privatisation for the sake of Tory dogma?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Lady is several weeks out of date with her information. I do not include the royal observatories, because they are not part of this year's research assessment review, so the costs are not applicable. I have told the House on more than one occasion that the excellence of the research conducted by those establishments goes without saying. Some establishments carry out research at international standards of quality, and are better than equivalent academic departments in universities.

When £690 million of Government money is being spent by those establishments, however, I have a responsibility to determine whether it is being spent effectively. There is no question but that some establishments needed to re-examine their management structures and, in certain cases, they have found new freedom in the private sector. However, as the hon. Lady now knows, the bulk of them will remain essentially in the public sector, which is absolutely consistent with the excellence of the research being conducted.

Social Chapter

12. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of British and foreign firms operating in the United Kingdom currently conform to the employment standards set by the social chapter. [15033]

13. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received on the impact of United Kingdom adherence to the social chapter on United Kingdom industry. [15034]

Mr. Lang: The social chapter is not in itself a set of employment standards. It is an open-ended mechanism that could be used to impose any number of damaging burdens on business. That is why British industry overwhelmingly shares our view that the social chapter would harm competitiveness and cost jobs.

Mrs. Jackson: Is the Secretary of State aware that large, responsible companies in this country conform happily with the articles in the social chapter? For example, British Steel, which has a large plant in my constituency, believes that it has nothing to fear from the social chapter as it has long-established systems of consultation, with joint shop stewards committees and a works council. It is more than happy to continue those arrangements. Is it not a fact that the Secretary of State is on record as supporting company works councils? Is he not aware that the majority of prospective Tory voters support signing the social chapter? Is it not true that, when a Government cease to listen to either business or the public, they will soon be out of office?

Mr. Lang: We do indeed listen to business. That is one of the reasons why we strongly oppose the possibility of placing social burdens on the British workplace that are handed down from the bureaucracy in Brussels. We oppose them, first, because we believe that those decisions should properly be taken in the workplace in this country; and, secondly, because the social chapter is not simply a finite list of impositions, but a mechanism through which innumerable further burdens could be passed down to British business. The social chapter would impose on Britain precisely those burdens that are so damaging to employment and prosperity in the countries of Europe.

Mr. Robinson: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor are giving the impression that it is possible to cherry-pick from the social chapter. Will my right hon. Friend tell the viewers that it is not like a "Masterchef" programme, that Ministers cannot behave like Loyd Grossman saying "Yahm, yahm", and that British workers will choke on the diet of the social chapter as they lose their jobs?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. Opposition Members do the public a great disservice when they pretend that they can pick and choose from the social chapter. A substantial number of measures would be decided under that chapter by qualified majority voting, and once we signed the social chapter, we would be unable to resist them. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, one signature on the social chapter could lead to half a million signatures on the dole.

Mr. Harvey: If the social chapter is as shocking as the Minister and his faithful chorus make out, why is France,

which has signed up to it, attracting more inward investment than the UK? Why is Ford willing to divert production to countries that have signed up to it? Why can Toyota and Unilever anticipate circumstances in which they would divert investment to countries that are part of it? Is everyone out of step but the British Government? The social chapter is so bland in its terms, and all parties are committed to retaining unanimity on the majority of them. Why, then, is it so objectionable? Is it not a demon that the Tories have invented to frighten British voters?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is singularly ill informed. France does not have more inward investment than the United Kingdom. France enjoys around half the inward investment of the UK. The UK attracts more than 40 per cent. of all investment from Japan, Korea and the United States into Europe.

Far from being isolated, the Government's view is shared by business organisations and business men all over Europe—for example, Ivano Spalanzani of the Confartigianato, who says:

"In Italy, businesses should be allowed to follow the British system";

or Dr. Harald Mahmile of the German-based BASF, who says:

"It is only the British who tend to forget just how impressive they are";

or Guus Broos, the head of a major Dutch business association, who says:

"The British way is best."

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we were to join the social chapter, it would be a trojan horse for every politically correct social employment measure that might emanate from our socialist partners in the European Union, and that that would destroy all the competitiveness gains that we have made in the past two decades? That would be a disaster for the United Kingdom, and would involve us losing our veto over social employment measures.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. The contrast in unemployment levels is dramatic. In Germany last month half a million Germans lost their jobs in one month. That is why German business men are investing in this country rather than in Germany, and why German business organisations are calling on their Government to abandon the European social model that is so damaging to industry.

Mrs. Beckett: Why does the Secretary of State go on repeating such nonsense? Did he not see an article by Stewart Steven in *The Mail on Sunday* this week, which described the Government's case on the social chapter as straightforward untruths, and accused them of comprehensively lying to the British people? How does the right hon. Gentleman square all the stuff that he has been reciting with Ford's decision to take investment from Britain to Spain and Germany, or with BMW's statement that our opt-out from the social chapter is irrelevant to its decision to invest in this country? Is not the biggest danger to 3.5 million British jobs the fact, as Toyota recently highlighted, that under this Government Britain seems increasingly likely to opt out of Europe?

Mr. Lang: The right hon. Lady is completely wrong. Ford is not moving investment from Britain to Europe. It has 30,000 employees in this country and has recently extensively extended its investment in the UK. It plans to invest £1 billion in this country between now and the end of the century. BMW has also invested heavily in the UK.

What I am saying about the social chapter and the social model from Europe is the same as is being said by business leaders in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Italy. In almost every country of Europe, the business community recognises the damage to jobs that is caused by the European social model. Only by resisting the Labour party's policies to impose it on us shall we sustain the success of our employment record and our creation of enterprise and jobs in this country.

Lady Olga Maitland: Is my right hon. Friend aware that German businesses are desperate to escape the heavy add-on social costs of employing people, and are coming to this country? In the past year alone, 58 German companies came to the UK, and more will be coming. Is that not a lesson that we should learn—that to sign up to the social chapter would be death to jobs in the UK?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why inward investment is coming to this country, not just from America, Japan and Korea but from within Europe, in record amounts.

Manufacturing

14. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on trends in the balance of trade in manufactured goods. [15035]

Mr. Greg Knight: The balance of trade in manufactured goods as a proportion of gross domestic product has remained broadly unchanged over the past four years.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the Minister not understand that we must take a longer-term view of the British economy? Any fair-minded person who examines our track record since 1983 will see that since that time we—an industrial manufacturing nation to the core of our being—have had a deficit in manufactured trade, and the Chancellor himself predicts in the Red Book that in two years we will have a £10 billion deficit. Those of us who support British manufacturing industry and want it to thrive must not listen to glib quotations from a few foreign—or European—manufacturers. At home we have a dismal record of under-investment and under-achievement, and it is about time that we had a Government who ensured that the position was reversed.

Mr. Knight: I do not recognise the picture that the hon. Gentleman paints. Under the present Government, total investment has risen six times faster than it did under the last Labour Government. Britain is and always has been a trading nation: we have about 1 per cent. of the world's population, yet we are the fifth largest trading nation in the world. Conservative Members are proud of that.

Post Office

15. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future of the Post Office. [15036]

Mr. Page: The Government's view on the future structure of the Post Office was set out in our Green

Paper, "The Future of Postal Services", published in June 1994, and in the statement of my right hon. Friend the then President of the Board of Trade to the House on 11 May 1995.

Mr. Foulkes: May I give the Minister some helpful advice? Given that the vast majority of the British public are opposed to privatisation of the very profitable Post Office, and given that they also consider it one of the best public services—way ahead of gas, electricity and water—will the Minister now take action to prevent Tory Members from becoming an endangered species by ruling out the inclusion of Post Office privatisation in the Tory election manifesto?

Mr. Page: The hon. Gentleman will have to await our manifesto and the Prime Minister's statement. He will have to control his natural impatience until then, but let me draw to his attention a document that has just emerged from the Communication Workers Union. In the Green Paper, the CWU seeks greater commercial freedom, and expresses a wish to move the Post Office more into the private sector than ever before. Is that the real break between the trade unions and the Labour party?

Mr. David Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that the issue is not always, "Should we privatise, or should we retain in private ownership?"? The real issue is, "What is the best way in which to ensure that the post is delivered to our constituents on time?" If private ownership would achieve that better, and if as a result of that postmen would receive better salaries—and bonuses at the end of the year—perhaps both postmen and our constituents would prefer a change of ownership.

Mr. Page: I fully accept that it is the customer who matters, not the system that is used. In order to help the customer, we have abolished restrictions on capital expenditure in the Post Office. Moreover, a new corporate planning process has been introduced, and we have been able to grant the Post Office significant new end-year flexibility. We have done all that in order to help the Post Office to provide the customer with a better service.

Mr. Llwyd: That may be all very well, but does the Minister not agree that we have the best postal service in the world, or at least in the British Isles? Does he not recall the huge public support for the status quo that was evident in the last discussion about privatisation? Does he agree with the sentiment "If it ain't broke, why fix it?"?

Mr. Page: Life moves on. Nothing can remain static. The recent decision by the Dutch post office—which has been privatised—to bid for the international express carrier TNT is a case in point. We must look to the future to ensure that Royal Mail can stay as No. 1, rather than remaining vitrified.

Ministerial Visits (Hong Kong)

16. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what visits have been made by Ministers in his Department to Hong Kong to discuss business matters since 1992. [15037]

Mr. Page: Since April 1992, there have been 10 visits by DTI Ministers to Hong Kong to pursue British commercial interests.

Mr. Winnick: It is interesting that the Minister said "British commercial interests", which we all support, but what other business have Ministers been engaged in? In what way is the money from Hong Kong billionaires collected to help fund the Tory party? Is it done through his or some other Government Department? We would like to know, because the money is undoubtedly coming from very rich sources abroad to a British political party.

Mr. Page: I am completely innocent on those matters and am unable to help the hon. Gentleman. I suggest that he directs his remarks to the chairman of our great party, who will be able to furnish him with the correct answers.

I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would talk about Hong Kong being the United Kingdom's second largest market in Asia and how important it is to British jobs, but obviously he is more interested in funding.

Manufacturing Output

17. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the percentage change in manufacturing output for (a) 1996 over 1995 and (b) 1995 over 1994. [15039]

Mr. Greg Knight: Manufacturing output was 2.2 per cent. higher in 1995 than in 1994. Last year it rose by a further 0.5 per cent. to reach its highest ever level. The CBI expects manufacturing output to grow by 3.4 per cent. this year.

Mr. Cunningham: The Minister's answer paints a rosy picture, but is he aware that, according to the Office for National Statistics, capital investment is down 16 per cent. on last year? What does he have to say about that?

Mr. Knight: I will tell the House what I have to say about that. Manufacturing output has risen by 10 per cent. since the recovery began, and manufacturing exports have risen by more than a third—to record levels—since the recovery began. The hon. Gentleman should welcome that.

Balance of Payments

18. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the balance of payments current account. [15040]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The balance of payments current account was close to balance during the first three quarters of 1996—the strongest performance for a decade.

Mr. Touhig: But will not 1996 be the 11th consecutive year in which the balance of payments current account has been in deficit? The Treasury forecasts an even wider deficit in the next two years, giving Britain the longest run of balance of payments deficits for 130 years. Are the Government proud of that record?

Mr. Taylor: The current account balance was strong in 1985-87, was weak in 1989-90, and is strong again now.

As I have said before, there have been only six years since 1946 in which there was a surplus in visible trade: 1956, 1958, 1971, 1980, 1981 and 1982. All those were years in which there was a Conservative Government.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend agree that a factor of great importance to British exporters is the value of the British pound? If the pound becomes too strong, it will be much more difficult for British exporters to win in foreign markets. Is there not a case, perhaps, for cutting interest rates to reduce the value of the pound?

Mr. Taylor: That is properly a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Social Chapter

19. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies have indicated to the Government that they located in Britain because of the absence of social chapter obligations; and how many have said they would relocate elsewhere if Britain adopted the social chapter. [15041]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Since 1992, more than 1,700 inward investment decisions, expected to create more than 130,000 new jobs, have been notified to the Invest in Britain Bureau. Our flexible labour market has been a key factor in that achievement.

Mr. Simpson: Since my question was about how many firms said that they would not come here if we had the social chapter, and how many would leave if we adopted it, I presume that the answer that the Minister was looking for was, "None".

Is not the more typical attitude of UK industry to share the views of Unilever and United Biscuits, which said that it would be counter-productive to exclude British workers from the provisions of the social chapter? Are the Government not embarrassed to set a benchmark in Europe in which Britain offers no employment rights, low employment protection, no parental leave and no consultation rights at all?

As the Government take their soap-opera policies into Europe, is not it appropriate for the citizens of the UK to ask that the Minister looks for something more inspirational than Ministers behaving badly as the model to which we aspire?

Mr. Taylor: It is not for me to cross-examine international companies on their reasons for investing in this country. They may do so for many reasons. We have an established enterprise culture, good communications, a skilled work force, low interest rates and inflation and the English language. There are many reasons, and I am not referring to any one of them in particular, but I am claiming that it is a great success story.

Regional Development

20. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the value of grants allocated to recipients in England from the European regional development fund since its inception. [15042]

Mr. Greg Knight: Of the £7.1 billion, in 1996 prices, allocated to England for the period up to 1999, £5.3 billion has already been earmarked for recipients.

Sir David Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those are considerable sums? Does he further agree that they play an important part in strengthening the British economy? Are the British people fully aware of the size of those grants and, if not, what steps is he taking to publicise them?

Mr. Knight: May I, first, say to my hon. Friend that when I was in his constituency recently I was impressed by the buoyant mood of business men there. As he knows, his constituency qualifies under the part of the fund for the midlands uplands programme. I welcome the fact that some of that money will go to his constituency.

The availability of those funds is fairly widely publicised, and from time to time we consult local authorities and others to see whether further measures need to be taken.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Would a point of order be in order, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: It would not be a perfect day without a point of order from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Faulds: I appreciate your appreciation, Madam Speaker. A little earlier this afternoon, an hon. Gentleman on the other side referred to a statement being made to the viewers. That really is unacceptable in this ancient Chamber. Would it not be advisable that, when these occurrences take place, the hon. Member should make a requisite apology to the House? Would it not also, in addition, be advisable to consider the removal of these objectionable cameras, which give an extremely false impression of the House at work?

Madam Speaker: The original reference to the television came from an Opposition Front-Bench Member. I deprecate the reference that was made. Such behaviour is infectious, and it was referred to again by a Conservative Member. However, I have received an apology from the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), who seems to be itching to say something, and no doubt to apologise.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I apologise for referring to the cameras. All I can say is that it was a slip of the tongue under pressure.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): On a wholly different point of order, Madam Speaker. You have always deprecated the release of information outside the House that ought properly to be given to hon. Members in the House. I want to draw your attention to my complaint about the proceedings of the Scottish Grand Committee, which met in Montrose on Monday. I tabled Question 2, which was about the local government funding formula imposed by the Scottish Office on local authorities. During that meeting, we expected and received from the Secretary of State for Scotland an announcement of a change in the capping formula. The change affects not only my constituency, but 15 local authorities.

Immediately the Secretary of State sat down, my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and I went next door to telephone our local authority to get its reaction. We informed it of the statement, only to be told that it already knew about the change, because it was mentioned in a local newspaper, which, it turned out, had received a fax from the two prospective Conservative candidates for our constituencies.

The seriousness of the complaint was such that I wrote to the Secretary of State about it. In his reply, he said that no discourtesy was intended and added:

"My special adviser telephoned Scottish Conservative Central Office as soon as the Committee was informed."

If that is true, I have no objection. But the time was clearly on the fax, and it was sent before the Secretary of State had even risen to speak to the Scottish Grand Committee.

I find that absolutely intolerable. We are sent here as Members of Parliament to represent everybody in our constituencies. It is intolerable that Departments should release information in advance, not to the elected Members of Parliament but to prospective Conservative candidates. That is quite unacceptable.

Madam Speaker: I have read the correspondence with the Secretary of State for Scotland, which the right hon. Gentleman was good enough to send me. I have carefully examined that exchange of correspondence. As the House knows, I deplore any breaches of the convention that important information on public affairs should be made known to the House before it is released to anyone else. There was a deplorable lapse in this case and I look to the Secretary of State, as I do to all Ministers, to take particular care that that convention is observed at all times.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I should like to raise a point of order, Madam Speaker, as I am also itching to say something. In his very courteous answer to Question 1 earlier, the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs said that Ministers in his Department were not particularly responsible for relations with Madeleine Albright in London. May I take it that that will be brought to the attention of Downing street and the Foreign Office, so that the question of Libyan sanctions can be brought to her attention?

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Mr. John M. Taylor): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I am not authorised to say more than I did earlier, but I shall certainly convey the hon. Gentleman's point of order to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

BILL PRESENTED

Right To Work

Sir Ralph Howell, supported by Mr. Frank Field, Mr. David Alton, Sir Wyn Roberts, Mr. David Howell, Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Sir Rhodes Boyson, Mr. Michael Alison, Sir Anthony Grant, Mr. Hugh Dykes, Mr. Bob Dunn and Mr. Winston Churchill, presented a Bill to establish the right to work and to impose a duty on the Secretary of State to offer work instead of benefit to persons who would otherwise be without work in the United Kingdom; to establish a system of grants to certain parents; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 113].

School Intruders (Criminal Offence)

3.35 pm

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North–East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to create an arrestable offence of unlawful intrusion into designated educational premises.

A generation ago, when you, Madam Speaker, and I were at primary school, we worried about all sorts of things. I was lucky enough to attend Brooklands school in Stafford—an excellent school—where I worried about the work because I could not do it, games lessons because I could not do games and mostly about whether that awful milk would be frozen again. However, I never worried about security, and I do not believe that my parents did, either. That was then, and this is now. The world has changed and I am old enough to begin to regret that.

The Bill deals with the growing problem of school intruders, which has been highlighted by recent tragic events. The presence of intruders on school premises is always unsettling to children and staff, and can be extremely dangerous. At present, staff can only seek to persuade the intruder to leave, and the police, if they are good enough to attend, do not have the backing of criminal law to deal with the problem, unless the intruder has committed some further specific offence, such as frightening or terrifying people on the premises.

The current inadequate law covering such circumstances is found in section 40 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. It covers only local authority and—now—grant-maintained schools and requires the intruder to commit some further offence on the premises, following which he can be removed from the premises by a policeman, but nothing more. He can only be escorted outside the school gates. He cannot be taken further away or prevented from walking straight back on to school premises, either immediately or as soon as the police have left the scene. He can be guilty of an offence that is dealt with only by means of a summons and carries a maximum fine of £50. That wholly unsatisfactory piece of legislation is no longer adequate to deal with the problem faced today by schools.

I take the view that school premises must be made more secure. The Bill would be a significant and practical step towards achieving that. I do not want, even if it were possible, 10 ft high fencing around schools and padlocked gates. I have seen it elsewhere and it does not create an atmosphere in which I want my children or any other children to be educated.

The Bill would return to head teachers control over school premises for which they are in many respects legally responsible, but over which they have inadequate legal powers. The police would have the power to attend and to remove intruders forthwith, securing the safety of the children and the staff. Our schools are currently wide open to ill intentioned intruders who create problems ranging from mere nuisance right up to seeking customers for drugs. Society should no longer have to tolerate that. The Bill would give schools a significant and important power to make them safer places for pupils and staff.

If I am given leave to have the Bill printed, it will consist of three clauses, the first stating simply, subject to the remainder of the Bill:

"Any person who, without lawful authority, enters onto or remains upon educational premises and who, having been asked to leave those premises by the head teacher or principal or someone acting on his behalf, either refuses to leave those premises or re-enters those premises within the period of 24 hours shall be guilty of an offence."

That offence would be arrestable, so that the police had a duty—or at least the power—to attend and to arrest and remove. It would carry a prison term not exceeding three months or a fine not exceeding £2,000. That is the least protection that we should offer our children and those who teach them.

The head teacher would be the key. If he refused to allow someone to remain on the premises, that person would have to leave. Failing that, the offence would be complete. We would not have to wait, as at present, until children are cowering in the corner of the classroom before anybody can do anything. We would not have to ask teachers to go out, unprotected by the law, to try to persuade dangerous, worrying or disturbed people—criminals, often—to leave the premises. The Bill would also apply in other circumstances.

I do not intend to give examples from my constituency, because it would be invidious to single out a school and worry the parents of the children at that school. However, I challenge any hon. Member who is doubtful about the need for the Bill to ask teachers and head teachers, "Have you had a problem with school intruders? Could you deal with it properly? Would you like the power to do so?" I suspect that all hon. Members on both sides have already done that. I think that they will have had the same answers that I have had.

I am grateful for the support that I have had from members of the Labour party and from Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): And the Ulster Unionists.

Mr. Butler: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. Conservatives always hope to receive the support of the Ulster Unionists, but we cannot take it for granted.

Whom would the Bill catch? It would catch intruders. I have already referred to people looking for customers for drugs, but that is only one example. It would exclude from school premises all other people seeking to prey on children. It would deal with the regular problem of excluded pupils seeking to come back to school premises and create a nuisance, sometimes leading to criminal damage. Such people could be dealt with before they committed any further offence. It would also deal with parents who come on to school premises legitimately, but who intend then to work out a grudge against a teacher or the head teacher. It would also deal with people coming on to school premises out of school hours—a prevalent and increasing problem.

Whom would the Bill not catch? It would not catch the rambler or walker who was on school premises unknowingly. It would catch only those who were knowingly on premises that were clearly educational, designated under the relevant Act. It would also not catch any legitimate visitor.

Who wants the measures passed? I hope that all hon. Members present today are here to show their support. The Secondary Heads Association certainly wants it.

[Mr. Butler]

I was told over the telephone yesterday to "go for it." The National Association of Head Teachers issued a press release that says:

"The NAHT considers it imperative that the provisions of this Bill are introduced. Of course it would not completely free schools from the problem of intruders, but the fact that it will be an offence to trespass would serve as a deterrent for many and enable the police to support schools more effectively than at present."

I believe that teachers, parents and pupils want the measure enacted. I have already invited any hon. Member who doubts that to ask their own teachers, parents and pupils. I hope that the House will also want to see the Bill enacted. Subject to the election, I hope to be here to see it become law by the time schools return for the next school year, in September 1997. I therefore seek leave to bring in my Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Peter Butler, Mr. David Jamieson, Sir Jim Lester, Sir Donald Thompson, Mr. John Sykes, Mr. Matthew Banks, Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva, Mr. Den Dover and Mr. Nigel Evans.

SCHOOL INTRUDERS (CRIMINAL OFFENCE)

Mr. Peter Butler accordingly presented a Bill to create an arrestable offence of unlawful intrusion into designated educational premises: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 111].

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I do not wish to quarrel with your decision on the point of order made earlier by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), but it has been the practice recently for hon. Members to obtain a Minister's statement from the Vote Office as soon as he stands up in the House and fax it to their friends. Consequently, those friends have the whole statement 10 or 15 minutes before the Minister sits down. I assume that that is not the practice that you are trying to end.

Madam Speaker: No. The practice that I deprecate is a Minister giving information to Conservative central office or Conservative candidates before giving it to the Scottish Grand Committee. That is it in a nutshell.

Social Security

3.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

Madam Speaker: I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 10th February, be approved.

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Amendment Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

Mr. Lilley: The main order uprates nearly all benefits in line with inflation. It is the biggest spending decision that we take in the Department every year. Even with inflation at only just over 2 per cent., uprating benefits will cost £1.7 billion in the coming year. It is right and proper to uprate benefits, because that meets our commitment to the neediest in society.

I am proud that, despite the pressures on public spending, all basic benefits have been uprated every year since I have held office. Of course, it was not always so. Under the previous Labour Government, benefits were not uprated fully in 1976 for past inflation, and pensioners were robbed of £1 billion in today's money. Pensioners may therefore find a recent statement by the shadow Chancellor somewhat disturbing. In a speech last month, in which he spelled out his new, macho approach to public spending, he said:

"We will keep a tough grip on the cash totals of departmental spending . . . there cannot be an assumption that totals will be automatically adjusted upwards in the event of changes in inflation."

I wonder whether the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) can reassure pensioners and others about whether their benefits would be automatically adjusted upwards in the event of changes in inflation. I am happy to give her the opportunity to do so. Perhaps she will do so later, although I am not sure what value pensioners would put on an assurance from the hon. Lady, because she has changed her mind on everything, and her party's track record is not good. We shall wait and see.

The fall in unemployment since the previous election is another source of pride. Unemployment is down by more than a million since April 1992, and is now declining even faster. Expenditure on benefits for the unemployed is therefore falling, and is set to fall further. Expenditure on other groups has risen, but three quarters of the growth in spending in this Parliament has been on people who are elderly or disabled, or the long-term sick. Spending has grown on the elderly, because people who reach retirement age can now expect to live for two years longer than people who reached retirement age in 1979. People live longer under the Conservatives.

Spending on disabled and long-term sick people has grown because we give more generous benefits. We are proud of the fact that we give four times more help to disabled and long-term sick people than did the previous Labour Government.

The two sides of the House have had their disagreements on analyses of past social security spending, but we can now both agree about future spending levels. In his speech on 20 January, the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) committed the Labour party to our planned expenditure levels, Department by Department and year by year. It was an amazing tribute to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that the Opposition clearly believed that his figures were right to the last penny. It means that we can have a rational debate about how we should keep within those budgets, on which both sides of the House agree, and we can both be measured against the same yardstick.

I shall spell out the measures that we intend to take to keep within the published targets for my Department. It will be up to the Opposition to say whether they would implement those measures, or what other measures they would introduce to achieve the same savings. In total, the measures which I announced in the Budget debate just before Christmas, but for which we must legislate, will save nearly £300 million in the second year of the spending round, rising to £1 billion in the longer term. So either the hon. Member for Peckham must enact £1 billion-worth of my savings measures, every one of which she has condemned, or she must replace them with alternative measures that save as much. I think that she will find that, when the shadow Chancellor told her to keep within my budget, he was handing her a live grenade with the pin pulled out. We shall wait to see how she deals with it.

The largest of the changes that I announced was the proposal to equalise benefits for lone parents with those available to married couples. It will apply to new claimants only, who will receive the same family premiums and child benefit rate as couples. Existing lone parents will keep their present higher rates unchanged in cash terms. That equalisation is fair and, ultimately, it will save £500 million a year. It requires legislation, which we shall introduce early in the new Session.

I have written three times to the hon. Member for Peckham asking her a simple question: would she implement those changes to equalise benefits for lone parents with those for married couples? If she will not, and if she decides to pay £500 million more to lone parents than we plan, she can get it only by reducing benefits for married couples, for single people without children, for the disabled or the elderly, because they are the only other categories who receive benefits under our budget.

Let us have no pretence from the hon. Lady that she can conjure up £500 million of savings from expensive schemes designed to get lone parents back into work. It is socially desirable to get them back to work, especially from their point of view, and I welcome the fact that the Labour party has copied some aspects of our Parent Plus scheme. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but we are frank enough to admit that it will probably cost money. We have budgeted some £20 million for the scheme.

We have studied similar schemes worldwide and know of no scheme that saves more money than it costs, including the Australian scheme, JET, which the Labour party claims as its inspiration. That scheme has been going since 1989 and has cost £40 million more than it has saved. That is calculated on the basis that everyone leaving the scheme for a job is counted as a saving in benefit terms, although similar schemes in New Zealand and elsewhere suggest that as many as 80 per cent. might have got jobs anyway. It is therefore simply cynical of the Opposition to pretend that they can bank on savings from that source.

We can all agree that the ideal way to curb social security spending is to get people out of unemployment and into jobs. Here, Britain's record over this Parliament has been outstandingly better than that of any major country in Europe. We have created more jobs than all the other major countries of Europe put together.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: I shall give the hon. Gentleman a chance to listen to a bit more before he takes part in the debate.

We have created more jobs than all the other major countries of Europe put together. We have a higher percentage of our population in work, and that is rising. We have a lower level of unemployment, and that is falling. So, for the best of reasons, expenditure on benefits for the unemployed is now falling in this country, and set to go on falling.

We have achieved that relative success by following a clear strategy—by creating a flexible labour market, deregulating, reducing taxes and cutting social costs on employers, so that our social on-costs add £15 to every £100 in pay, whereas in France on-costs are twice as high, at £31 for every £100 on the payroll, and in Germany they add £41 to every £100 on the payroll.

We are making work worth while, by paying in-work benefits to those with families and high rents to pay. Those policies are working. They are creating jobs, attracting inward investment and winning plaudits from foreign firms moving here. They are securing the ringing endorsement of objective bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund.

In contrast, the Opposition's approach is clearly incredible. It is riven with glaring contradictions. Let me mention two. The Saturday before last, the Leader of the Opposition told his local government conference that a Labour Government would spend more on education, which he claimed would be financed by savings on social security achieved by Labour's scheme to get a quarter of a million young people into work.

Yet a week later the shadow Chancellor, in an interview in the *Evening Standard*, said in the clearest possible terms that, far from saving money, the scheme would cost a net £3 billion—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I shall quote his words:

"I estimate"—

[Interruption.] These are the words of the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, and Opposition Members would do well to listen to them:

"I estimate that to meet a commitment to create 250,000 jobs for young people will, over the course of a parliament, cost a minimum of £3 billion . . . I do not think anybody is in any doubt that a windfall levy will raise that sum of money."

[Mr. Lilley]

Either the scheme would save money or it would cost money. Either it would help the Leader of the Opposition pay for more spending on schools, or a minimum of a £3 billion tax on the utilities would be required to pay for it, as the shadow Chancellor admits. They cannot both be right. Which of the two does the hon. Member for Peckham support—her leader or her shadow Chancellor? Will the scheme save money or cost money?

It is no good suggesting that the £3 billion cost cited by the shadow Chancellor is a gross cost that would be offset by savings. If the savings exceeded the cost, there would be no need for an extra tax to finance the scheme. In connection with the Budget proposals that the Chancellor announced before Christmas, I negotiated with the Treasury a "spend to save" programme of anti-fraud measures that will save more than it costs—so we shall not need any extra taxes. It will help us in our task of bringing taxes down.

The simple truth is that the shadow Chancellor is, in that respect, right. The costs of such schemes invariably far exceed the benefit savings. The reason is simple. There is a large dead-weight cost. Last year, half of all those who would have been eligible for his £1,500 subsidy to help them back into work got jobs anyway. So the money spent subsidising them would be wasted.

Then there is a large substitution and displacement cost. Many employers would take on people eligible for the subsidy instead of others whom they might otherwise have taken on, and people in that second group would therefore find themselves unemployed and drawing benefit.

There is also a recycling cost: employers might not keep their subsidised recruits once the subsidy has run out, after only six months, so the net number of additional jobs is likely to be only a small fraction of those who receive the subsidy. I wish that that were not the case and that such schemes were cost-effective but, alas, all the evidence suggests that only narrowly targeted schemes create any extra jobs and that few, if any, result in net savings to the taxpayer.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): If the money for those makework schemes is to be raised by a windfall tax, what is the likely effect on employment in the utilities to which the tax would apply?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which it is for the Opposition rather than for me to answer. I venture to suggest, however, that the effect would be negative and that there would be an adverse effect on employment in those industries, to add to the problems that I have already mentioned.

The Opposition's proposals have a second and equally glaring internal contradiction. They claim that reducing the cost of employment by giving employers a temporary £60-a-week subsidy would create extra jobs; yet they simultaneously claim that increasing the cost of employment, by the national minimum wage, not to mention European social costs, would not destroy jobs.

Either employers are sensitive to the costs of employing people, in which case the national minimum wage would be a disaster, or they are not, in which case the hope of reducing unemployment by job subsidy is an illusion. The Opposition cannot have it both ways.

I am happy to come down on one side of the horns of the dilemma: the truth is that employers are indeed affected by the cost of employing people and that a national minimum wage, which would permanently raise costs and affect millions of people, would be bound to destroy far more jobs than could possibly be created by a temporary job subsidy of £60 a week that ends completely after six months and covers only a few hundred thousand people.

The more Labour claims that its job subsidies are likely to be effective, the more alarmed we should all be about the far greater impact of the minimum wage, the social chapter, the European social model and trade union power, which it proposes to restore.

The largest element in my budget is not expenditure on unemployment, but the cost of state pensions. We have taken steps to contain the future growth of state pensions and, equally important, we have successfully encouraged the bulk of people of working age to opt for occupational and personal pensions. Today, I have published the latest estimate of the value of United Kingdom pension funds, which has reached a record-breaking £650 billion.

That may be denigrated and sneered at by the Opposition, but it is something that Government Members are proud of. The assets held in pension funds rose by a massive £50 billion in 1995. That increase in a single year is more than the entire year's spending on health and social services. Only because we have encouraged people to save and invest in private pensions is the additional potency of private investment brought to bear in financing future pension needs in this country.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Before the Secretary of State gets totally carried away on the subject of the privatisation of the pensions system, will he tell us what studies have been done by his Department into the amount that is being paid into private pension schemes by people in work, compared with the amount that they would have paid into a national insurance system if the state pension had been uprated properly in line with earnings, as it should have been, instead of the Government stealing so much money from pensioners?

Mr. Lilley: There are two aspects to that question. On whether state pensions should have been uprated in line with earnings, Labour Front Benchers—latecomers though they may be—agree that they should not; we welcome that agreement, although we understand that the bulk of Labour Back Benchers do not share in it. It would have cost the best part of £8.5 billion to uprate in line with earnings had we not changed the system.

The trouble with comparing the costs of the state system with those of private provision is that the state system does not involve any investment—and does not, therefore, receive the fruits of investment growth—whereas the private sector does. That is why it is advantageous, where possible, to get people to save and invest and to enjoy the fruits of investment. That is why we are proud of our success in encouraging the bulk of people to do so. Pension and life assurance assets now account for more than one third of net personal wealth in this country.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, over the past two days, the Select

Committee on Social Security has been hosting a Europewide conference on the comparison between funded and unfunded pension systems, which has looked at the hidden liabilities in European pension funds? It is evident—as all the other European parliamentarians attending the conference acknowledge—that the choices that we took during the 1980s, and those that we have taken since, to balance our hidden liabilities into the future, are choices that the others will have to make to stop their public finances falling into crisis.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) to make an intervention on private pensions without saying that he is, or was, an adviser to the insurance company, Legal and General?

Madam Speaker: The Chair does not rule on interventions. If the hon. Gentleman were to rise to make a speech, I would expect him to declare an interest at the beginning, but I cannot rule that he has to make such a declaration on an intervention.

Mr. Jenkin: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. May I point out to the House that I have had no connection with Legal and General for more than a year?

Madam Speaker: I am obliged.

Mr. Lilley: I do not know whether the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) wants to intervene to apologise. The House will note his ungracious attempt to slur one of my hon. Friends, and I shall think twice about giving way to him in the future. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Opposition Front Benchers apparently approve of such behaviour, which tells us something about them.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Is there not collusion between Opposition Front Benchers on these matters? In the corresponding debate last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) suggested that Labour would abandon its commitment to uprate pensions in line with earnings. When he did so, he was accused of peddling wild rumours from central office. We all know who was right.

Mr. Lilley: To respond to the important point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), I welcome the Select Committee's conference, which I saw was attended by an impressive array of continental experts and parliamentarians. Officials from my Department, and other Departments, have been to the conference and will report to me on the views expressed, which could be very interesting. I know from the Franco-British Council conference on the subject of funded pensions that there is great interest and considerable admiration on the continent for our success in building up private pension provision on the back of solid state-guaranteed pensions for the future.

Britain's strong position was confirmed recently by a new report from the International Monetary Fund, which highlights our enviable position compared with other European pension systems. The IMF estimates that the ratio of public pension liabilities to gross domestic product is 5 per cent. in Britain, compared with 76 per cent. in Italy, 111 per cent. in Germany and 114 per cent. in France. The value of assets held in UK pension funds exceeds those of all other EU member states put together. We believe that we are better placed to provide decent pensions for our pensioners in the future.

Only 43 per cent. of those who retired in 1979 were in receipt of occupational pensions. Now, the figure is 63 per cent., and it is even higher among those who have retired recently. Some 5.6 million people are holders of appropriate personal pensions. Seventy-three per cent. of pensioners have income from investments and savings, compared with 62 per cent. in 1979, and their average total net incomes have gone up by 60 per cent. more than inflation since then. That is a track record of which we can be proud.

I must mention two other issues before drawing to a conclusion. First, I refer to a recent misleading statement made by the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Chancellor and the hon. Member for Peckham, who is the shadow spokesman on social security. All of them have said that it is regrettable that we spend less on education than on unemployment. Where they get those figures, I do not know.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): They make them up.

Mr. Lilley: Yes, they must do. I want to put the actual figures on the record. We spend £36 billion a year on education. The cost of all benefits to unemployed people is some £9 billion and falling. I hope that those hon. Members will correct the misleading statements that they have made when they come before the House.

Since the welfare state was established, the cost of social security has grown twice as fast as the economy. It has taken a rising share of national income and has been the main factor in driving up taxes and in the changes and burdens on business. Because of the reforms that we have introduced, it is now set to take a declining share of national income, leaving scope for lower taxes and setting us on a virtuous circle of lower taxes, a more dynamic economy, generating jobs and getting people off welfare and thus further reducing taxes. We have achieved that because our reforms are focusing help on those in need, cutting out fraud, getting people off welfare and into work and helping to drive up private pension provision for the future. Those are achievements of which we Conservatives can be proud.

By contrast, the Opposition have attacked virtually every reform that we have introduced and every proposal that they have made involves spending more. The simple truth is that the Opposition cannot be trusted to reform the welfare state, because they believe that they have a vested interest in the votes of those who depend on the money from the welfare state. The Opposition tried to do an about-turn on the issue and to pretend that they can both spend more and save at the same time. As a result, they are riven by the internal contradictions that I have spelt out. They claim that they will live within our budget, but refuse to implement or replace the £1 billion of savings that we have announced.

We shall want to hear from the hon. Member for Peckham whether she will implement the changes that we have announced but have yet to legislate for on lone parents, housing benefit, backdating and so forth, totalling the best part of £8 billion.

[Mr. Lilley]

The Opposition claim that their subsidies for employers will create jobs, and then deny that the burdens of the minimum wage, European social costs and restored union power will destroy jobs. They claim that their schemes will save money, but then admit that they will require £3 billion in extra taxation to finance them. Rarely has a party demonstrated as comprehensively as the Opposition its complete unfitness to govern. Let us make sure that it remains on the Opposition Benches and leaves the Conservative party to continue with the most successful reforms of the welfare state in Europe.

4.12 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): I will begin by setting out our position on today's business. I shall advise my right hon. and hon. Friends not to vote against the general uprating order, because, as the Secretary of State has said, it contains upratings in line with inflation, which are important to those who depend on benefits.

There are many aspects of the Government's approach, however, with which we profoundly disagree. The Government have delivered a double whammy—higher costs for the taxpayer and lower benefits for the claimant. Their failure is clear from their record on social security. Perhaps that is why the Secretary of State was so defensive today and spent nearly all his speech attacking our plans. Clearly, our plans are the only plans that he feels are worth discussing.

The Secretary of State is so defensive about his record that he dare not put it before the House. The fact is that the cost to the public purse is up, and life for those on benefits is harder. The Tories are hitting the taxpayer and hitting the poor. They have failed on welfare because they have failed on work. One in five households of people of working age, not including pensioner households, have no one in work. In our divided Britain, there is poverty from the cradle to the grave: one in three are born into poverty; one in five pensioners die in it.

As this Parliament draws to a close, this debate provides a good opportunity to review the Secretary of State's record. At the last general election, the Tories posed as the party that would cut taxes; this afternoon, Secretary of State said that they had cut taxes. Could he have been referring to the Government's 22 tax increases? They posed as the party that would cut taxes, but instead put them up. They also posed as the party that would cut the social security budget, but instead they increased it. Since he became Secretary of State, the social security budget has risen. It is £15 billion a year more than it was in 1992, and takes one pound in three of all Government spending.

When the Secretary of State is in the mood to admit the increased spending, he blames the elderly. Like the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), he says that it is all the fault of our pensioners and that it is the Government's generosity: they are generous to a fault; the problem is demography, the aging population, more people with disabilities.

The right hon. Gentleman claims that it is generosity to the sick, the elderly and the disabled that has driven up the social security Bill, but it is not. More than half the increase, £8 billion extra a year, is a direct result of the growth of poverty and unemployment, which has led to the growth of income-related benefits. That is the price of Tory economic and social failure. It is not the elderly who push up the social security budget, but poverty.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady keeps making that point. The problem is that she does not understand the figures. Her predecessors, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), did their home work, discussed issues with my officials and got their facts right. I have great respect for them. If she wishes to be informed, I would be glad to help. Indeed, I am happy to give her a table with a breakdown of the £8 billion extra expenditure on income-related benefits that she equates with extra expenditure on unemployment.

Of that £8 billion, precisely £600 million goes on the unemployed. The rest goes on the elderly, the long-term sick and families. It goes, for example, on family credit and extra help for lone parents. The figures are all there; she can study them. The money does not go on the unemployed, and it is grossly misleading for her to suggest it. In particular, she does not seem to realise that people who get disability living allowance are automatically passported on to improved income-related benefits. They get £12.90 extra on the new lower rate of DLA, and that entitles them to an extra £20 a week of income-related benefits.

Ms Harman: That was the longest intervention on record. I am well aware of the Secretary of State's figures. He placed similar figures in the Library after Social Security questions.

The point at issue is clear. The Secretary of State tries to categorise, for example, the £10 billion of income support for lone mothers as a good thing because it is a family benefit. The Opposition say that £10 billion of income support for lone mothers, most of whom want to work, is not a sign of success, but of failure. It is why the social security budget has gone up. It has risen because of income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit and the economic inactivity of the one in five households of people of working age who are not in work. It is not acceptable for the Secretary of State to say that the increase in his budget is due to the growing number of elderly or the Government's generosity towards the elderly. That is an unrecognisable description.

Of the £14.8 billion by which the Secretary of State has increased the social security budget since 1992, only £1.6 billion of the extra is accounted for by pensions. It is not good enough for the Secretary of State to rely on patronising, sexist assertions that assume that women cannot understand figures. It is absolutely clear that there is an extra £8 billion in his budget as a direct result of the growth in poverty and unemployment.

It is not the elderly who are pushing up the social security budget, but poverty. It is not the disabled who are pushing up the social security budget, but unemployment—the one in five households of people of working age who are without work. They live on the breadline, and the taxpayer has to pick up the bill for those one in five households, which is why the taxpayer has seen his tax bill increase by the equivalent of 4p on the basic rate of income tax. It is to pay for poverty and unemployment which have increased since the right hon. Gentleman became Secretary of State.

The more the Secretary of State spends on benefits for people who should be working, the less the Government invest in the future and in education. His failure has caused the social security budget to increase and its spending to crowd out the sort of public investment that people want. The £8 billion extra that he is spending on poverty and unemployment could have paid for more nursery places, more after-school clubs, more teachers, more books and more computers.

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): With no discourtesy to the hon. Lady, may I ask her about one point that she raised on the subject of war pensioners? Many of those who have war pensions, and who are young like me, get fed up with her crocodile tears. One reason the social security budget has blossomed is that the Government have encouraged so many people to apply for war pensions. If I had had £1 for every senior citizen in my constituency for whom I had got a war pension, I would be a wealthy young man.

Ms Harman: The bill for social security in this country has not blossomed, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, owing to the Government's generosity to war pensioners. In fact, the Government, behind the backs of war pensioners, tried to cut their pension and deny it to them.

The social security budget has risen owing to the one in five households of people of working age who are not working—the tax bill of the other four families has therefore risen. There is an extra £15 billion on the social security budget this year compared to when the right hon. Gentleman took over as Secretary of State; only £1.6 billion of that increase is accounted for by pensioners. I hope that he will not claim that the extra numbers of pensioners taking up income support is a sign of success, not poverty.

I have looked through the figures that the Secretary of State put in the Library after I first raised the issue. The various allocations that he has made to try to smear over the issue conceals everything and confuses no one.

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that the hon. Lady would not want to mislead the House. She has just said that only £1.6 billion of extra spending is on the elderly: in fact, £3.3 billion of the total £14.6 spending is on the elderly, and £7.5 billion is on the long-term sick and disabled. That gives a total of £10.8 billion, so three quarters of the total increase is spent on the elderly, the long-term sick and the disabled.

Ms Harman: I shall simply state the figures as they are once more. There is a total of £15 billion extra every year in the right hon. Gentleman's blossoming budget, comprising £0.7 billion extra on child benefit; £1.6 billion extra on pensions; £4.3 billion extra on incapacity and disablement; and the remaining £8.2 billion going on income support, unemployment benefit and all those people of working age who are not in work.

To be without work—to be in one of the one in five households where no one is working—is not only to be without a decent standing of living, but to live on the margins of our society. That sows the seeds of disillusion and despair. To be unemployed when young is to feel that one has been thrown on the scrap heap before one has even begun. The Government have failed the young unemployed: 500,000 people under 25 are unemployed, which is one in six of that age group. In some inner-city estates, half the people under 25 are out of work. In London, where my own constituency of Peckham is situated, 50 per cent. of young black men are officially registered as unemployed. That is why we say that there must be a windfall levy—a tax on the unfair and excess profits of the privatised utilities. We can use the money to break the vicious circle and get 250,000 young people who have been without work for six months off benefit and into proper work or training. When they reject that windfall levy, the Government reject all hope for the young unemployed.

We know that, the longer a person is out of work, the harder it is to get a job. The Government have failed the long-term unemployed—400,000 people have been jobless for more than two years and it costs the public purse £9,000 a year to keep someone trapped in unemployment. That is why we have argued for extra help for the long-term unemployed to get them into work—for a £75 a week national insurance holiday for employers who take on people who have been unemployed for more than two years; for a relaxation of the 16-hour rule to help the long-term unemployed to get the skills or educational qualifications they need to get the jobs that are available; and for a national minimum wage to help make work pay and enable people to move off benefit and into work.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: I shall give way in a minute, but I must press on because the Secretary of State made a long intervention that was half as long again as his speech.

The real map of poverty and unemployment stretches far beyond the official unemployment statistics, which have been fiddled more than 30 times by the Government. Among the poorest families in Britain today are those who are hidden from view because they are not on the official unemployment statistics, especially lone mothers. There are 1 million lone mothers who are trapped on income support, living on around £100 a week. Two million children in families headed by lone mothers are being brought up on the breadline. They face life on benefit for years, and the taxpayer now faces a bill that has risen to £10 billion a year to support lone mothers and their children.

In the Secretary of State's accounts, that is a success—a blossoming of the social security budget—and he calls it family benefits. We call it those mothers who want to work being trapped on benefit at public expense—a sign of the Government's policy failure. In the uprating debate in February last year, the Secretary of State said that there were three steps he would take to halt the rising number of lone mothers on income support. He has failed on all three of those steps, and there are more lone mothers on income support, not fewer.

The Secretary of State has failed to get lone mothers off income support by making absent fathers pay. He has failed to help lone mothers into work. Although he has cut lone mothers' benefit, that has failed to reduce the divorce rate. The Secretary of State is absolutely right in his determination to make fathers pay for their children.

Every child has a right to receive the emotional and financial support of both parents, irrespective of where they live. However, the latest figures from the Child

[Ms Harman]

Support Agency show that it has failed: in the past three months, only 15 per cent. of absent fathers paid the full amount awarded. The Child Support Agency has been so badly administered that it has caused real hardship to some, and to many more it has provided an excuse to abdicate responsibility for their children.

Experience from around the world shows that it is difficult to make absent fathers pay under any system. It is an uphill battle. It is not a task from which we should shrink—far from it—but we must be realistic: we cannot leave the children of lone mothers in poverty and allow the benefits bill to increase every year while we wait for absent fathers to wake up to their responsibilities. It is vital that lone mothers are able to work to support themselves and their children.

Here, too, the Government have failed. While more married women are going out to work, fewer lone mothers are in the work force—yet they are the ones who most want and need to work. Lone mothers in Britain are less likely to be in work and more likely to be dependent on benefit than lone mothers anywhere else in Europe. In France, 82 per cent. of lone mothers are in work compared with only 41 per cent.—half as many—in Britain.

The problem is not just financial, with children being brought up on the breadline and the taxpayer facing a growing benefits bill. There is the deeper problem of children being brought up without seeing the world of work, and growing up with the expectation that life is about receiving benefit rather than going out to work.

Lone mothers want to work—especially when their youngest child begins full-time schooling. That is the time when most married women start to look for work. For the past 17 years, this Government—and this Secretary of State for the past five years—have told lone mothers, "Here's your income support. I'll send it to you every week, and come back when your youngest child is 16." That has been the Government's policy for the past 17 years.

Lone mothers do not want to depend on benefit, and it should not have to be like that. I recently conducted a small survey of lone mothers in my constituency, which backed up the national findings. For example, Sheryl is 29. She has two children, aged eight and three, she lives on her own and the children's father pays nothing. Before she had her children, she worked as an administrative assistant. She has been bringing up her children on income support for the past three years. She wants to work, but she cannot because she is unable to match working hours with school hours. She said:

"My youngest child starts full-time school in January and, once she's settled, I would like to go back to work. But I can't because of all the problems of after-school care, school holidays and teacher training days."

The story is the same throughout the country: lone mothers want to work not in spite of the fact that they are mothers, but because they are mothers. Like all mothers, they are driven to give their children a better life.

The Secretary of State does not understand that problem, and he has no policies to address it. Labour in government would take action to break down the barriers that prevent lone mothers moving off benefit and into work. We will invite lone mothers whose youngest child is in the second term of full-time education into job centres to receive advice on jobsearch and on training and child care. We will introduce a national child care strategy, with a network of after-school clubs to help lone mothers match school hours with working hours and make work pay.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We have done that.

Ms Harman: Only one child in 80 have an after-school place, and the waiting lists are enormous. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where will the money come from?"] The Minister claims that the Government have provided those places, but Conservative Members ask where the money will come from. Clearly, they are split on that issue.

Mr. Mitchell *rose—*

Ms Harman: I shall anticipate the hon. Gentleman's question, and he shall see whether I answer it correctly.

We have said that more money needs to be spent on after-school clubs. They can be financed through a combination of measures: the lottery, public-private partnerships, benefit transfers, and by charging mothers who can afford to pay. After-school clubs are important for lone mothers and are popular with all parents. What has been lacking is a glimmer of understanding on the Government's part that they should provide such a service.

We will use benefit transfer schemes as a springboard for lone mothers out of dependency and into work. We will have targets for training and enterprise councils to train lone mothers, especially on term-time courses.

We will have one-stop shops like that pioneered by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who was in her place earlier. Information technology and the Internet are used to bring all the information that lone mothers need on to an easy-to-use computer with a touch surface. The user touches the screen for information about local jobs, child care and training and how her benefits will be affected. All that information is pulled together to provide a one-stop service, so that lone mothers can be helped to get off benefit, get into work and find their way through the maze of conflicting information.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Are we to understand that it is official Labour policy for the lottery to fund social services?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman does not understand. After-school clubs are not a social service. There is a big demand for them from parents. It is difficult for children to play out if they do not have a safe environment. Many mothers want to, and have to, work. After-school clubs are important for children to do homework, and possibly engage in other activities that have been squeezed out of the national curriculum, such as more music, art, drama and sport.

The lottery is well designed to provide resources for that, but it is not our only suggestion for financing. We have said that extra after-school club places can be financed through a combination of measures, which I set out. That has been supported by the Kids' Club Network. Until we raised the issue, it was not on the political agenda. When I mentioned after-school clubs, the

Secretary of State did not even know what they were, and had to run off to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to ask about them.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The hon. Lady is talking consummate nonsense. She knows perfectly well that there is nothing between the two sides of the House on after-school kiddies' clubs. The difference is that, over the past three years, we have created 80,000 places. We are committed to the scheme. In his Budget, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer put £24 million on the table to develop kiddies' clubs. How much money will the hon. Lady put on the table? Let us have a figure, instead of the re-announcement of Government policies and waffle that we get from the Opposition Front Bench.

Ms Harman: I welcome the signs that the Government have moved firmly on to our territory. They have recognised that they cannot defend a situation in which 1 million lone mothers are on income support, and the sole Government policy was to write to them from the Department of Social Security once every three years saying, "Are you still at that address? Are you still getting your income support okay?"

That was the Government's sole strategy for lone mothers. That is why 1 million of them are on benefit, 2 million children are on the breadline, and the taxpayer is picking up a bill for £10 billion every year. That is why we said that something must be done, and that we need a welfare-to-work approach. We offered a number of proposals, which I am outlining.

If the Government had ever recognised that lone mothers needed to work, they would not have simply have said, "Go away and come back when your youngest child is 16." If they understood the role that after-school clubs can play in helping lone mothers, we would not be faced with a situation in which only one in 80 children have access to an after-school club. If the Under-Secretary of State wants to assure me that he agrees with me about the policies that we have espoused and on which he has failed to act, he should vote Labour at the next election.

We will measure and report our progress with monthly figures. What the Government do is present the unemployment figures and say that unemployment is tumbling; what they never do is present monthly income support figures, showing that the number of people of working age who are not working is rising. The truth is that, in all his years as Secretary of State, all that the right hon. Gentleman has ever done is criticise lone mothers, and, of course, cut their benefits.

That brings me to the Secretary of State's third failed plan to reduce the number of lone mothers. Of course he has criticised lone mothers. Do we not all remember what he said at the Tory party conference? Of course he has cut lone mothers' benefits: that is evident. I hope that he will not even seek to deny that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): What did he say at the Tory party conference?

Ms Harman: We remember the Secretary of State's "little list." He stigmatised lone mothers and their children, saying, "There is something wrong with your family, so there must be something wrong with you," to the 2 million children of lone mothers. He has changed his tune, and to some extent I welcome that, but it does not change his record, as everyone knows.

Part of the Secretary of State's record is benefit cuts. Cuts in lone mothers' benefits make the poorest families poorer. In this uprating and in the further measures that the right hon. Gentleman proposes, he plans to cut lone mothers' income by £572 a year. He is not giving them any help so that they can obtain work; instead, they must suffer cuts in benefit.

The Secretary of State must know that, when women cease to be part of a couple and become lone mothers, they become worse off, not better off. Lone mothers are not advantaged; they are disadvantaged. They do not have their partners' income, or their partners' time. The Secretary of State's justification for cutting lone mothers' benefits, and making the poorest families poorer, is that it will deter couples from divorcing or separating; but benefit cuts for lone mothers do not make any couples stay together. Lone mothers are already worse off than married women, yet the divorce rate continues to rise.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): If the hon. Lady does not support the Government's measures on benefit for single parents, and given that the shadow Chancellor has made it clear that, if she were in office, she would be obliged to stick to the Government's totals for social security expenditure, what other cuts does she propose?

Ms Harman: We have said that the way in which to stop what the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) described as the blossoming of the social security budget, and hence the increased burden on taxpayers, is not to shave the benefits of the poorest families year by year. It has been said that, although the hon. Gentleman has no common sense, he has two brains, so he will know that lone-mother families are the poorest. He clearly agrees with that.

We cannot deal with the problem of the rising social security bill simply by reducing the standard of living of the poorest families. What we must do is go with the grain of what they want to do—what married women are doing—which is to go out to work. That is why it is so shameful that the Government of whom the hon. Gentleman has been a part have adopted a policy of saying "Here is your income support. Collect it weekly, and go away until your youngest child is 16."

Our approach will not be to cut the social security budget by making the poorest poorer. We will employ a welfare-to-work strategy to ensure that those people can obtain work, so that we no longer see an increase, year after year, in the number of lone mothers who are on benefit because they cannot work.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Harman: No, I will not. I have answered the question.

The problem is that the Government have put the social security budget up. My right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), the shadow Chancellor, is right to recognise the appalling state of public finances,

[Ms Harman]

to recognise that people have been hit by 22 Tory tax increases and to say that our priorities and our approach are different from those of the Government. Our approach is, as I have said, to employ a welfare-to-work strategy. That is why, as I said earlier, we will break the vicious circle by a windfall levy on the privatised utilities to fund a £3 billion welfare-to-work programme for the long-term and young unemployed.

In the debate on social security a year ago, the Secretary of State said that there were three ways in which he would stop the increase in income support for lone mothers. First, he would make fathers pay. He has failed. Secondly, he would get lone mothers to work. He has failed. Thirdly, he would deter people from becoming lone mothers, by ensuring that couples stay happily together by reducing the benefits for lone mothers. He reduced the benefits, but benefit cuts for lone mothers do not make couples stay together. Lone mothers are already worse off than married women, yet the divorce rate continues to rise.

Relationship breakdown is far more complex than a simple financial issue. Does the Secretary of State really think that couples will say to themselves, "Good heavens! The Secretary of State for Social Security has cut lone parent premium and one-parent benefit. Let's not break up. Let's stay together"? The world is not like that. That is why his strategy to reduce the number of lone mothers on income support has failed. Much as he may like to, he cannot regulate from Whitehall the relationships of men and women. What he could do but has failed to do is help lone mothers to do what they want to do—work.

After 17 years of criticism of benefit cuts, the Secretary of State has produced a leaflet, which he sent to all lone mothers on income support. I can see that he is leafing through his file, and that he has the second to latest version. I have the latest one. The most important thing that it does not say is where to go to find a job. The Government simply cannot understand that a maze of obstacles confronts women on income support who want to go to work. A one-stop-shop approach is needed, not one set of advice on benefits, another on work, another on training, and another on child care.

Undeterred, this afternoon I rang the hotline number on the leaflet, and spoke to Lee. He was courteous and polite, but explained that he cannot give any advice about an individual case. He certainly cannot give any advice about availability of jobs, training or child care, as that is nothing to do with the Department. However, he offered further leaflets on benefits.

If the Government's back-to-work strategy for lone mothers is to send them a leaflet and then have a hotline that offers them further leaflets, it will not succeed. It is very expensive. It cost £750,000 to get three columns in the *Daily Mail* to defend the Government's lamentable record. That is the wrong use of public money.

With our welfare-to-work strategy, we will, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition set out, spend less on unemployment—mopping up the cost of Government failure. Then we will be able to spend more on education, investing in the future for success. The failure to get people off benefit and into work forces the benefits bill up, and the Government squeeze benefits: cuts in benefits for asylum seekers, cuts in benefits for war pensions, cuts in benefits for people who are not well enough to work, and cuts in housing benefit.

The Conservatives used to say, "Let the housing benefit bill take the strain." Now they have cut it. They also used to say that unemployment was a price worth paying. From October 1997, they propose that single people under 60, including widows who have lived all their lives with their husbands, will be forced to go into shared accommodation to claim housing benefit. How can the Secretary of State justify that? For the third year running, the Government have cut housing benefit for parents whose grown-up children still live with them. It is not always easy for an adult to live with his or her parents, particularly if he or she is without work. That cut simply makes it more difficult. How can the Secretary of State justify that?

One important way to curb the spiralling housing benefit bill would have been to take the tough action that Labour proposed on the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill. The Select Committee on Social Security estimates that one in every five pounds spent on housing benefit are wasted on fraud, but the Secretary of State refuses to implement our proposals for tougher measures.

We must at all times remain vigilant in the battle against fraud on the public purse, no matter where it is committed. Every pound wasted on fraud is a waste of taxpayers' money, which could go to those in need, and a waste of public support for the welfare state. Labour defends the welfare state, and we want to see it better defended against the abuse of fraud.

The changes in the uprating order fail to help our poorest pensioners. It is a scandal that, after a lifetime of work or caring for their family, pensioners are some of the poorest people in Britain today. Pensioners have been hit hard by the Government's policies. The Tories broke their promise and put VAT on gas and electricity. Up and down the country this winter, pensioners are having to choose between heating and eating. That is one reason why we will cut VAT on fuel to 5 per cent.

Almost 1 million pensioners fall through the net altogether. They are entitled to income support, but they do not claim it.

Mr. Matthew Banks: What about the environment?

Ms Harman: One of the shadow Chancellor's proposals for the windfall levy to help the young unemployed is an environment task force. One of its jobs could be to insulate the homes of elderly people. At one and the same time, that would give useful work to young people who are wasting on the dole, would cut pensioners' heating bills and would improve the environment.

Almost 1 million pensioners fall through the net altogether.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady's flow. Will she tell us what Labour's policy is on uprating the basic pension, because Opposition Front-Bench Members declined to do so the last time we debated this subject? Is it true, and can it be confirmed, that the Labour party has now abandoned its long-standing pledge to uprate pensions in line with earnings?

Ms Harman: We have set out our policies clearly in our document "Security in Retirement", which was passed

by our conference. We have said that pensioners are fed up with a Government who made promises that they did not keep, and who promised not to put VAT on gas and electricity and did so. We recognise that the public finances are in a very bad state due to the Government's incompetence.

We will only make promises that we can keep, which is why we have told pensioners that we will cut their fuel bills by reducing VAT on gas and electricity. We have said that we will keep the basic state pension as it is now, not means-tested, and that we will uprate it at least in line with prices. We have had to say that we will not promise to finance a commitment to increase it in line with earnings, not least because the Government have destroyed the public finances. We set that out very clearly in our document "Security in Retirement".

Almost 1 million pensioners fall through the net altogether. They are entitled to income support, but they do not claim it, and lose £14 a week on average. Of those pensioners, 800,000 are women living on their own. They have no state earnings related pension, no occupational pension and no savings: they have nothing.

The Government are making matters worse. The existing 35-page income support form is part of the reason why 1 million pensioners are deterred from claiming their entitlement. Under the misleading title, "Simplification of Procedures"—a document that was sneaked out at the time of the Budget—the Secretary of State announced that yet more obstacles will be put in the way of people who intend to claim income support, including pensioners. The Government are putting more responsibility on claimants for the correct completion of the form, and are requiring more evidence to support claims. The Secretary of State's proposals will deter thousands more pensioners from claiming the money to which they are entitled.

The Secretary of State says that the poorest pensioners do not claim the money to which they are entitled because they choose not to do so: they do not want it. The idea that 1 million pensioners choose to be on average £700 a year worse off is ridiculous. The truth is very different. The message to pensioners from the Government has been clear: "If you claim benefit, you are a scrounger; if you are a pensioner, you are a burden." One million proud pensioners have got that message loud and clear, do not claim their benefit, and suffer hardship as a result.

We argue that the proposals in the Government's Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill for cross-matching local government and Government data between Departments should be used to get help to pensioners who do not claim their entitlement, yet the Government have refused to accept that. They are prepared to cross-match data to combat fraud, and we support that, but not to help the poorest-paid pensioners who are losing out.

Not only are the 1 million pensioners who do not receive the income support to which they are entitled worse off, but the Government have imposed VAT on fuel, cut in half the value of the state earnings-related pension scheme, and put pensioners in fear of having to sell their homes to pay for long-term care.

The Secretary of State has boasted again about second-tier pensions and occupational pensions, but the fact remains that 12 million people at work today have no occupational pension. Many of the 6 million people whom the Government encouraged to take out personal pensions, especially those on modest incomes, have found that such pensions eat up up to a third of their savings in charges. Many of those who came out of occupational schemes at the Government's urging have found that they are very much worse off, and have been missold personal pensions. Millions of people at work today face poverty in retirement.

The Secretary of State should spend less time lording it over everybody else in Europe, and a little more worrying about people at work today who do not have a proper second-tier pension, and who will therefore fall back on means-tested benefit and have a very low standard of living when they retire. That is why we need a new framework of value-for-money second-tier pensions that fits the changing world of work, where more women are working and there are more part-time workers and small employers. That is why we are proposing a new form of funded second-tier pensions for those who do not have access to an occupational pension, through our plans for a stakeholder pension.

We are also proposing to extend choice through our plans for a flexible decade of retirement. Over the past few years, the pattern of work has changed, and many people now want to retire early. If, at no cost to the public purse and without recourse to it later, people can draw their state pension early because they have shown that they have sufficient savings or an occupational pension, greater flexibility and choice can be provided. We must end the "one size fits all" approach to the welfare state.

The welfare state has an important role to play as part of an efficient economy and a just society. There have been huge social and economic changes since Beveridge created the welfare state in 1945, and they present great challenges. The welfare state can meet those challenges, but it needs to be modernised. It needs to move ahead of social and economic change, not lag behind it as the Government have allowed it to do, with lone mothers, for example; become flexible to respond to the diversity of people's lives, with regard to the age of retirement, for example; work alongside a dynamic economy, because the welfare state cannot ever be an alternative to work; be a force for social cohesion in our divided society; and provide a new balance of rights and responsibilities between individuals and the state. It needs a Labour Government, and the sooner the better.

4.58 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I should like to begin by citing some more figures on the balance of social security expenditure—the crucial point on which there have already been exchanges between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his shadow, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman)—because the figures bear out absolutely what my right hon. Friend was saying.

Of the total social security budget, 44 per cent., £40 billion, goes on benefits for elderly people; 25 per cent., £23 billion, goes on benefits for sick and disabled people; and 19 per cent., £18 billion, goes on benefits to families. Benefits to unemployed people are a relatively modest £8.6 billion. Even adding in the further £4 billion of expenditure for which the Department for Education and Employment is responsible, expenditure on assistance for unemployment people is still overshadowed by all the other programmes that are central to the welfare state.

The Opposition are claiming that there is gold at the bottom of the garden in the form of some extraordinarily high level of benefits paid to unemployed people, out of

[Mr. David Willetts]

which they can finance every expenditure programme that passes through their mind. No matter how successful we are in bringing down unemployment, the money spent on benefits for the unemployed, running at 9 per cent. of the social security budget, could not finance every pet programme that an Opposition spokesman wanted to introduce.

The other mechanism for financing the Opposition's pet programmes—the windfall tax—would be equally damaging to the economy. Sometimes, the situation is unclear—we are told on the one hand that measures will be self-financing and then on the other that they will be financed from the windfall tax. That is confusing. I would welcome an intervention from someone on the Opposition Front Bench to explain that confusion.

Mr. David Shaw: My hon. Friend has been complimented in the past on perhaps having more than one brain. Does it not require only one brain, or even perhaps half a brain, to understand—although Labour is not admitting this—that, if employers are to be subsidised to take on 250,000 young workers and encouraged to reduce their employment costs, they will, in all probability, get rid of 250,000 older people?

Mr. Willetts: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is what the Americans would call a no-brainer. That would be one of the effects.

I should like to contrast the range of measures that the Government have in place to help unemployed people into work with the measures advocated by the Opposition. There are two ways of helping unemployed people into work. One is by straightforward incentives. We have made massive improvements in incentives since 1979. The gap between the average incomes that someone could expect in work and out of work is now such that we can be confident that just about every family would be better off in work. That is a massive improvement on the mess of the social security system in 1979.

I welcome the ingenuity of the Department of Social Security in perpetually seeking further ways of ensuring that incentive effects work. We have helped people to carry on with some entitlement to housing benefit for a few days or weeks when they first get back to work. The back-to-work bonus is an incentive worth up to £1,000 for unemployed people getting back into work. There is a national insurance holiday for employers who take on someone who has been long-term unemployed. All those incentives are the right way to go with the grain of the labour market and help unemployed people back to work.

The second way—I am afraid that this is a rather cumbersome expression—is by much more active management of unemployed people. That means not ignoring them and simply allowing them to sign on every two or three weeks and leaving them alone in the interim, but actively managing and encouraging them, boosting their morale and helping them actively to seek work. That is what job clubs are about. They are extremely cost-effective. That is what restart interviews are for and one of the reasons why the pilots of project work in Medway and Humberside are already showing such good results. I welcome the fact that we are going to extend project work to 100,000 unemployed claimants.

Training is oversold as a way of helping unemployed people back to work. Of course training is good if it increases what economists call the human capital of people who have been unemployed or in low-paid work, but it is not a panacea for unemployment. Training is often best deployed with people who are already in work—perhaps low-paid work. As the employer gets to know an employee's aptitudes, he can invest more money in raising their skills and helping them into better-paid employment with that firm.

Too often, training schemes aimed solely at the unemployed play a cruel trick on them. There is sad evidence from research that training schemes can increase an unemployed person's perception of the wage that he should command by more than they increase his skills and qualifications. Paradoxically, they can set him back in seeking work. That is one reason why Labour's much-vaunted attempts to expand training programmes to help unemployed people into work could well have perverse effects.

We recognise that sometimes, when unemployed people find their first jobs, they may be relatively low-paid. That is where family credit comes in. I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) in his place, because family credit was brought in when he was Secretary of State for Social Services. Family credit addresses directly the problem of people in low-paid jobs whose family responsibilities are such that we cannot expect them to keep their families to a standard of living to be expected in a civilised society on their basic pay. Family credit, which now amounts to almost £2 billion a year, tops up their incomes.

One of the most depressing aspects of the Labour party's feeble attempts to defend its minimum wage policy is the way in which it systematically rubbishes family credit.

Ms Harman: We do not.

Mr. Willetts: The hon. Lady says that they do not, but Opposition spokesmen and the recent report from the Institute of Public Policy Research have said that family credit is an indiscriminate wage subsidy that unscrupulous employers use to hold down wages below the level at which they would otherwise be. We are told that the minimum wage will somehow achieve benefit savings by stopping that abuse of the benefit system by employers. That is one of the ways in which Labour claims that the minimum wage will save money.

The research shows how false that charge is. It shows that only 9 per cent. of employers are aware of the exact status of their employees and whether they would be able to claim family credit. We know that only 12 per cent. of those on family credit claim it for more than a year. Family credit is not an indiscriminate wage subsidy. It helps people starting back into work, perhaps in relatively low-paid jobs, who then move up to better-paid work. It goes with the grain of the labour market and is a much more effective way of helping people than the minimum wage.

Have Labour Members justified the minimum wage? They seem to imagine that employers will not mind paying the extra costs of employing someone with a minimum wage of £4 or £4.26 an hour. If employers will pay the higher wage, why does the Labour party also

advocate a £75-a-week tax rebate for employers who take unemployed people into work? Presumably Labour Members believe that pricing people into work is effective in those circumstances. That is why they advocate the rebate. If the rebate helps to price people into work, why will the minimum wage not price people out of work? They cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I invite my hon. Friend to shed a little further light on the exchanges between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) on the distribution of the increase of social security between unemployment-related poverty and other programmes. Is it not evident that the hon. Member for Peckham is including any growth in family credit as a negative factor—as part of the unemployment-related problem—rather than as a positive programme which is helping people back into the jobs market?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. To regard family credit, which supports people in work, as a cost of unemployment is perverse, even by the extraordinary accounting conventions that the Labour party seems to use.

We know from research done by the Institute for Fiscal Studies how badly targeted a minimum wage would be. Many of the people who would benefit from the minimum wage live in relatively affluent households. According to the IFS research, the most affluent third of households would gain bigger increases in their incomes from the minimum wage than the poorest third. The Labour party complains about growing divisions in the country, but it advocates a minimum wage that would benefit the most affluent households more than the poorest households. That is extraordinary and perverse.

Mr. David Shaw: I can give my hon. Friend an example of how the minimum wage creates jobs. Calais, which is just 22 miles from Dover, has a minimum wage, and unemployment there is so bad—it is double the Dover level—that French people rush across the English channel to get jobs.

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. The Labour party's policies—the minimum wage and the social chapter—derive from its belief that such issues are better managed on the continent, but the evidence shows that exactly the opposite is true. The Labour party wants to copy policies that have delivered 4.5 million unemployed in Germany, more than 3 million unemployed in France and more than 2 million unemployed in Italy. In this country, with Conservative policies, we have fewer than 2 million unemployed, and falling. The Labour party's policy would be an extraordinary trick to play on the British people.

Mr. Berry: Can the hon. Gentleman name a year since 1979 in which unemployment, on the claimant count, has been lower than the level inherited by the Conservative Government?

Mr. Willetts: I cannot remember every year's unemployment figures since 1979 off the top of my head. It is the trend that is important, and we have a downward trend in unemployment. Our labour market reforms have made the falls possible and the policies that the Labour party advocates are driving up unemployment on the continent, so the message is clear.

The Labour party says that it believes in the importance of education and training. It claims that the windfall tax will be used to finance measures to invest more in education and training. However, its policies would have the opposite effect. If the minimum wage were introduced at £4 or £4.26 an hour, what would happen to someone who has worked hard for an NVQ, some GCSEs or an A-level and who earns £4.50 an hour, such as a senior cook in an hotel? Alongside such a person, the assistant might earn £3 an hour.

The minimum wage would have one of two effects. One is that the unskilled worker in the kitchen would receive the same pay and the skilled cook would want the differential reinstated—that is a good old-fashioned expression from the 1970s that would come back if we ever had a Labour Government. The restoration of differentials would lead to an old-fashioned increase in wage costs that would drive up unemployment. That is why a minimum wage would cost 800,000 jobs at £4 an hour and more than 1 million jobs at £4.26 an hour.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My hon. Friend has given an excellent example of the effect of a minimum wage. It is relevant to the north-west, especially in Fylde where the tourism industry is strong. The introduction of a minimum wage would cause huge unemployment, because the newly trained would not get jobs. There would be fewer jobs because the tourism industry would be less viable. The young—for example, university students in Lancaster—would not be able to get jobs and learn a trade.

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. Important British industries, such as the tourism industry, would be significantly threatened by a minimum wage.

Mr. Booth: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Willetts: I shall give way in a moment. I first wish to impale the Labour party on the twin horns of a dilemma. The first horn is the restoration of differentials, which would cause a significant increase in unemployment—

Mr. David Shaw: And in strikes.

Mr. Willetts: Yes, strikes would increase as people demanded their differentials. However, if the Labour party claims that the minimum wage would not cause wage increases, it would be telling people not to bother to obtain qualifications or to stay on at college to be trained, because they would not get any more money if they did so. That is the second horn of the dilemma, and it is extraordinary hypocrisy for the Labour party to talk about its support for education and training.

Mr. Booth: Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of the minimum wage, I remind him that the chairman of the Confederation of British Industry recently gave specific examples of factories in the north-east in which at least 50 per cent. of the work force would have to be put out of work, if the minimum wage were introduced at the levels proposed by the Labour party, because the work would be done in the far east.

Mr. Willetts: I agree with my hon. Friend. The gains that have made us a paradise for inward investment, as Jacques Delors put it, would be lost if we imposed the same social costs as they have on the continent.

[Mr. Willetts]

Strangely, the hon. Member for Peckham did not mention another Labour party policy that has implications for education and training, even though it is one of its few specific policies on social security. I refer to the means testing of child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds, which would be an attack on people staying on at school to get an extra qualification. The electorate are entitled to know the details of the means test for child benefit for those children.

We are all familiar with the arguments about the Princess of Wales and other rich people getting child benefit, but the Labour party faces a practical problem: either it uses the means tests that already exist—the income support means test, for example—or it introduces a new one. In the first case, many families with modest incomes, for whom the decision of a child to stay on at school is financially significant, would lose child benefit. In the second case, the Labour party would have to spend large sums on a new means test, with a new administrative structure and new computer programmes, to take child benefit away from a relatively small section of the population. That is another policy that would do nothing to encourage education and training: it would have the opposite effect.

I accept that, when people get a job after a period of unemployment, or for the first time, they receive low pay; people do not necessarily start work on a high income. It is important to have an open and mobile society so that people can reasonably hope that, if they stick at their work, turn up at work punctually and get an extra qualification, they can look forward to promotion and rising income. All the evidence is that Great Britain is one of Europe's most successful societies in delivering rising incomes to people once they have their first foothold in the labour market.

According to a study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in Sweden, which is one of the models that the Labour party is supposed to admire, only 39 per cent. of under-25s enjoyed a significant increase in their incomes over a five-year period, whereas in Great Britain 62 per cent. of the same group enjoyed an increase in income. The poorest 10 per cent. in 1991 enjoyed, on average, a 25 per cent. increase in income in the following year.

Thanks to research commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, we know that people who were in the bottom fifth of the earnings scale in 1979 enjoyed, over the following 15 years, an increase in their earnings of 42 per cent., much better than the 33 per cent. increase in incomes enjoyed by people in the top fifth of the earnings scale; thus, those who started in 1979 at the bottom of the earnings scale did better than average over the following 15 years.

All that paints a picture of a mobile and enterprising society. It is not a continental stakeholder society that believes in standardisation and regulation; it is a flexible labour market in which we aim to help people to get their first toehold in the labour market and, once they are there, through education, training and investment in their futures by their employers, to look forward to their incomes rising.

This country is seeing a transformation of the pensions regime. One change to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred—I cannot improve on what he said—is the shift towards funded provision and the extraordinary boom—which, we hear today, has reached £650 billion—in funded pensions. What a contrast with the unfunded pensions liabilities that will hold down the public finances and the balance sheets of private companies on the continent.

Another change is happening in the world of pensions. It is a change from defined benefit pensions to defined contribution pensions. Old-style, defined benefit occupational pensions may have been fine in the days when one joined a company and stayed in the same firm for 40 years, but with a more mobile economy and a flexible labour market, fewer people live that sort of life. Once people moved and started shifting around, those occupational pensions often treated people extremely roughly. That is why many more people instead want defined contribution schemes, which allow them to see a pot of funding accumulating in proportion to and in accordance with the contributions being made.

I am aware that, for some people, the administrative costs of taking out a personal pension on its own have been too great, which is why it is important to encourage good personal pensions that are a sensible compromise between traditional, occupational defined benefit schemes and completely individualised personal pensions.

I welcome the fact that, only the other week, we had a further announcement of more liberalisation of the regime for group personal pensions. I hope that what we heard is not the end of the matter, because the biggest obstacle to encouraging the private provision in which all Conservative Members believe—private provision for pensions and private insurance against the vagaries of life—is the regulatory burden faced by people trying to provide such financial services. If we are serious about wanting more people to take out more insurance cover and personal pension cover, saving for their retirement or for a rainy day, we must make it possible for people in the City of London and our other great financial centres to market those products effectively.

There is nothing more depressing than talking to a banker who says that the bank has an extraordinary amount of money sitting in interest-bearing deposit accounts because it does not believe that its customers know or are confident about what financial instrument, savings package or insurance product they should buy. I am afraid that regulation in the City of London has got out of hand. We are in danger, through over-regulation, of making it excessively difficult for the people whom we want to encourage to sell financial services around the country to do so effectively. To have a company like the Prudential, for which I have the greatest respect, being fined by City regulators seems to send out exactly the wrong signal. No useful purpose is served by such excessive and heavy-handed regulation.

We can be sure, however, that the way forward is by encouraging personal saving, personal pensions and personal insurance, not by the route to which the hon. Member for Peckham briefly referred when she, somewhat hesitantly, talked about a stakeholder pension scheme. I wanted to hear more about stakeholder pensions. We know where those exist—in Australia, where they are industrywide and involve representatives of the trade unions and employers' bodies, who run them along old-style, corporatist lines.

If we are to have a modern economy for the 21st century, I should like to hear the Labour party define those industries. How are we to define an industry within which everybody is supposed to have an industrywide pension scheme? How would Richard Branson's business be defined if it were to participate in such a scheme? Will the Labour party go down the route recommended by the Chairman of the Social Security Select Committee, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who sadly is not with us today, but who has clearly advocated in the past that trade union representatives should sit on so-called "stakeholder corporations" to manage those pension funds?

If I were an elector thinking about the future of my pension and I had a choice between backing funded pensions that had already accumulated £650 billion of savings or, alternatively, backing a stakeholder pension in an industrywide scheme, partly managed by trade union bosses, I know what I would want for my future. I would know how my pension would be most secure. When it comes to both jobs and pensions, the Conservative party clearly has the agenda for the 21st century.

5.27 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I suppose that this debate is an annual discussion of the issues surrounding the welfare state and its funding. The Secretary of State seems to take great pride in announcing inflation-level increases in benefits and assuming that everything is all right. Clearly, when he is driven here in his chauffeur-driven car, he does not see people begging around tube stations in London. Nor does he see people waking up under soggy blankets alongside the Thames, or broken-down people desperate to find enough money from somebody to buy themselves a cup of tea during the day.

Since 1979, the Government have presided over an enormous shift of wealth from the poor to the rich, and over the degradation of many people in our society. Poverty blights the lives of about a quarter of this country's population. The latest figures show that between 13 million and 14 million people in Britain live in poverty. That is a sixth of Europe's poor—24 per cent. of the population. Worse still, 4.3 million children are living in poverty—and they call this a Government of success. In 1979, 1.4 million children were living in poverty. That figure was not good, but it is less than one third of the present level.

The wealth of the poorest tenth of the population has been reduced by about 18 per cent., whereas the richest tenth are roughly two thirds better off than when the Tory Government were elected. We are now presiding over a massive shift of wealth from the very poor to the very rich. People in the middle have not felt more insecure or unhappy since before the second world war, because they see the destruction of services all around them. Taxes have regularly been reduced to make the rich better off, so services for the rest of the population have had to be severely cut.

If the 1978-79 income tax regime were in place today, a further £31.4 billion would be available. The top 10 per cent. of taxpayers have enjoyed a reduction in their income tax; indeed, they have received 48 per cent. of total tax cuts. We must seriously examine the issue of distribution between rich and poor within our society.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for having the courage to bring socialism into the Chamber, when it has become so profoundly unpopular. How does he explain the fact that, despite his belief that there would be much more money available if the rich were taxed more—based, presumably, on the assumption that they would simply stay around to be taxed more—Treasury figures, which were first asked for by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), show conclusively that, when we decrease tax rates on the rich, the rich as a whole end up paying more to the total tax take, therefore making a bigger contribution to helping the people whom the hon. Gentleman wants to help? Is not his problem the fact that he wants to hurt the rich more than he wants to help the poor?

Mr. Corbyn: I am not sure from which university one graduates with a degree in gobbledegook economics; perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell us later. The simple fact is that his party, his Government and his philosophy aim to increase the power of the rich by reducing their tax burden. The knock-on effect is to cut public expenditure for the rest of society. That is why no houses are being built, hospitals are being closed, class sizes have increased and people are begging on the streets.

Visitors to this country who have not been here for 10 or 15 years find the situation shocking. They ask me, "Whatever has happened in London? Why are all these people homeless? Where have all these beggars come from?"

Mr. David Shaw: From Paris, via Eurotunnel.

Mr. Corbyn: Witty remarks by people such as the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who could not give a fig for the poor anyway, merely discredit him and his party even more, and show them up as what people know them to be and what they have always been—the party of division between rich and poor.

Mr. Nicholls: Now what is the answer?

Mr. Corbyn: The answer is a society seriously interested in caring for all its population, not just for those who can make a lot of money out of exploiting other people.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbyn: No, not a second time, because I want to make a little progress.

Poverty affects every aspect of people's lives. In my constituency, registered unemployment is about 22 per cent. On some estates it is probably 50 per cent., and for young black people it is much higher. When we talk about life to people on income support who are trying to bring up children, we start to see an awful lot of other things.

Constant unemployment means low income for the household, no extras for the kids, poor-quality furniture, lack of entertainment and a pretty miserable existence. It means poor-quality food, undernourished children, short

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life expectancies and a constant burden on the health service, because, for reasons that we understand, poor people tend to be ill more often than rich people.

Mr. Shaw: I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that there are Conservative Members, including me, who genuinely want to try to create more jobs in the economy. But surely he must realise that in his constituency there is no incentive for businesses and employers to move in. All over London, Labour boroughs have discouraged employers and moved them out, replacing them with high-rise blocks of flats into which they put benefit claimant after benefit claimant, because they want the Labour votes. Labour boroughs have gerrymandered instead of creating jobs and attracting employment into their areas.

Mr. Corbyn: My borough has a serious housing problem, which will be solved only by a programme of building and buying homes with affordable rents. The way in which the housing benefit system has been manipulated by the Tory Government over the past 15 years to subsidise extortionate rents charged by private landlords is outrageous.

I can give an example. Of two identical houses side by side, one is rented from the council at a weekly rent of about £55, which is paid by housing benefit because the family are unemployed. The family next door, who are also unemployed, rent privately what used to be a council home for £180 per week. That, too, is paid by housing benefit. Where is the sense in spending that public money on housing benefit, just to please a private landlord?

The council wants to solve the housing problem in the borough. I want to solve it, too. That can be done partly by better management of the property that we have, but, crucially, it can be done by the construction of new homes with affordable rents.

The housing benefit bill in this country is enormous. It does not help the individuals who receive it, because it was designed to help landlords who have benefited from deregulation.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Of course I acknowledge that there are problems with housing benefit, but when he cited his example he made no allowance for debt charges on the house that is still in council ownership. Surely if one does that, not necessarily for that particular house but overall, it changes the figures substantially. The debt on a house that has been sold will have been paid off, because that is how the regulations work.

Mr. Corbyn: I realise that it is some time since the hon. Gentleman was a local councillor, and he may not have heard that the Department of the Environment has ring-fenced housing revenue accounts. The argument that council tenants are subsidised by the rest of the population is simply untrue. The issue is that a great deal of money is being made by private landlords for doing precisely nothing—and they are being subsidised by the state to do nothing. That is an abuse of public expenditure.

Mr. Hughes: We have had the joke, but what about the serious answer? Of course I know that housing revenue accounts are ring-fenced; I served on the Standing Committee on the legislation that brought that about, and I understand it well. The point is that there is still a debt charge on the house that the council has not sold. That has to be taken into account in the figures that the hon. Gentleman puts to the House. I realise that he is making a serious point, but the contrast between the two figures is not nearly as marked as he suggests.

Mr. Corbyn: The contrast is exactly what I said it was; I gave the figures. The ring fencing of the housing revenue account means that it has to bear the cost of debt charges on money borrowed over 60 years, as most local authority loans are, whereas a mortgage is usually taken out over 20, 25 or 30 years. That is the difference.

Public investment in good-quality housing is good for the people who live in it, and good for public expenditure as a whole. Spending money on housing benefit to prop up private landlords is not good. It is a crass waste of money, as the Government are at last beginning to recognise.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I always enjoy the hon. Gentleman's speeches, and I have great respect for the integrity that he brings to his side of the debate, especially as it makes his hon. Friends on the Front Bench squirm. Will he make something clear to the House? He has said that extra public expenditure is needed. Will he confirm that he is entirely happy with the Labour party's policy of living within the Government's overall spending totals, in the unlikely event of Labour ever being elected?

Mr. Corbyn: I have no idea, any more than any other Opposition Member, what the books will look like when we have won the general election on 1 May. But rest assured that I shall be here, campaigning for better housing for the poor in this country. Whether the Minister will be here as well is for the voters of Gedling to decide.

I shall now move on to the issue of health, and the link between poor health and poverty. The Department of Health now acknowledges that life expectancy for the poorest in our society has worsened. For some very poor people, it is almost as bad as it was in the 1940s.

There have been some interesting articles on the subject in the *British Medical Journal*. Infant mortality statistics show that death rates for first babies born into the poorest social class, class V, are 70 per cent. higher than in social class I, and that babies born to unemployed parents are almost twice as likely to die as those born to the wealthiest class.

The public health officer's report for Camden and Islington makes chilling reading. Infant mortality, life expectancy and the incidence of notifiable diseases are much worse than the national average. What is worse, the suicide rate for men has risen dramatically with the rise in unemployment and poverty in our society. There is a downside to the idea that all one needs to do is to give more money to the rich and let it trickle down to the poor. There is an increase in absolute poverty and deprivation.

The meanness of the Secretary of State's policy is apparent in many areas, one of which is the treatment of asylum seekers. An extremely small amount, compared with the Department's total budget, used to be spent on supporting people who were quite properly conducting an

appeal against the refusal of benefits because they were asylum seekers. They lost those benefits and are living in desperate poverty.

The National Assistance Act 1948 ruling by the court means that local authorities have to support people who face destitution. I welcome that ruling, because it is one way of getting some food into the mouths of desperately hungry people who are fleeing from fear and oppression in another society, but by rights the Department of Social Security, not local authorities, should bear the cost.

Benefit rights for asylum seekers should be fully restored, so that the spirit of the 1948 legislation, to remove the fear of starvation, poverty and homelessness from everyone in our society, can be seen to be a reality. I hope that the Secretary of State will tell us that he is prepared to restore those rights.

Mr. Stephen: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a genuine asylum seeker who claims asylum when he arrives does indeed receive benefits in the time that elapses before his case is decided, but that people who prove to an immigration officer that they are coming here as tourists or students, or on business, that they have tickets to get home at the end of their stay, and that they have the means to support themselves while here, do not get benefits, and nor should they?

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman has slightly misunderstood the rules. If people arrive here and claim asylum, not at the port of entry but subsequently, they have difficulty in getting benefits. If they have applied for asylum and it has been denied, and they are quite properly pursuing an appeal, which is their right, they have no access to benefits while the appeal is being pursued, which can last for up to three years.

We have a large number of absolutely destitute people in our society because the Government are playing the racist card against people who are victims of terrible situations in other societies. Last week, some asylum seekers from the middle east described to me the torture, pain, horror and terror that they had experienced at the hands of the regime from which they had fled. Their asylum applications had been turned down, they had no benefits, and they were living on gifts from people in local churches or—

Mr. David Shaw: Not genuine asylum seekers.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position that they were not genuine asylum seekers, but how on earth can he say that? He did not interview them, and he does not know them.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbyn: Hang on a minute.

The account of the torture of those people and their families deserves at least to be listened to and given serious consideration. They have quite properly exercised their right to appeal against the decision, but the problem is that they get no benefits while the appeal is being processed, which may take a very long time. It is disgraceful. It is equally disgraceful that people are on hunger strike in British prisons, yet the Home Office apparently could not give a sod.

Mr. Stephen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbyn: No, I am not going to give way any more. I shall move on, because I know that other hon. Members want to speak in this debate, which is not only about asylum seekers.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and the Secretary of State spoke about pensions and the so-called pension reform that is being paraded around by the Government and any number of right-wing think tanks as a great success. The problem is that in 1980 the Government broke the link of the annual uprating of pensions with earnings, and switched it to prices.

In the late 1970s, pensions had been increasing as a proportion of average earnings and had reached about 24 per cent. by 1980; today, the figure is down to 13 per cent. and falling. Indeed, one of the Secretary of State's predecessors said that at this rate it would eventually become nugatory.

Many in the Conservative party think that it is right to cut the value of the state earnings-related pension scheme, to create an enormous market for private pensions, and to ignore the consequences, which are that many elderly people are living in desperate poverty with no access to anything other than the state pension and state benefits, many of which they do not claim for various reasons, and that people in middle age who are in work—especially if they change jobs frequently or have occasional periods of unemployment—cannot buy into any kind of occupational scheme. They could possibly buy into a private scheme, but the cost would be phenomenal.

Many people heading for retirement age have no security whatever, other than the state pension and the state benefits system. We are facing an increase in poverty among the elderly in 10 to 15 years' time, rather than the majority being better off, as the Government like to suggest.

I believe passionately in a universal welfare state, and I believe that state pensions should be linked to average earnings and should be sufficient to live on, as they are in most European countries. The notion that the social security system should provide both a safety net and a marketplace for the private pensions industry seems entirely wrong to me.

I support the principle of universal benefits, for several reasons. They are effective, as child benefit has demonstrated, and they are cheap to administer. For example, in 1994-95 administration expenditure on the means-tested targeted directive for the social fund—if ever there was a Tory measure, that was it—was £209 million, out of a total budget of £451 million. How on earth can spending 40 per cent. of the value of the entire benefit merely on making sure that people do not get it be justified?

That is the reality: we are spending huge amounts on making sure that people do not get their benefits. We must get away from the mentality of spending millions of pounds on administration to stop people getting benefits, when we see poverty and misery increasing all around us.

The welfare state is crucial and will dominate political debate in the coming years both here and throughout Europe. I am entirely familiar with the argument being

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made around Europe: we must cut corporate taxation, so benefits have to be cut to allow corporations to compete with the low-wage economies of the far east. That is the road to ruin and disaster. We should argue the case instead for a high level of provision under a universal benefit system.

It has been clearly demonstrated that if we continue on the present road we will increase the divisions in our society and increase poverty, and it will do nobody any good at all. To see what happens in societies that do not have welfare state provisions such as those that this country was once proud of, one need only look at the way in which the poor are treated in the worst states in the United States and in emergent industrial economies with a limited, if not almost non-existent, welfare state. The social division, misery and unemployment are apparent. It is time for us to change course and to consider protecting and, indeed, extending the welfare state.

Much has been made of employment. The best way of dealing with employment problems and to recognise the insecurity faced by people in work is to introduce a national minimum wage at a decent level. It is wrong that many people are forced by the jobseeker's allowance to take jobs at £1.50 or £2 an hour. If they refuse to do so, they may lose all benefits.

For example, a family on housing benefit and income support living in a private rented flat in London could pay as much as £100 to £150 a week for their flat, and their income support could be £60 or £70 a week depending on their circumstances. If a member of the family refuses a job—however low the wages—he loses housing benefit and other benefits. If he takes the job, the family will lose housing benefit just the same, and many people will be worse off in disgraceful low-paid jobs than they would be on benefit. The use of family credit as a prop to low wages and poor-quality employers is not the right way forward. It is time to change course and to get rid of the jobseeker's allowance. Instead, we must look to people's needs and the elimination of poverty within our society.

I recognise that time is moving on, and my final point deals with the way in which young people are treated in our society. Successive Secretaries of State for Social Security have been almost obsessed with cutting or restricting benefits for young people under 25. The most important change to the benefit system was the Social Security Act 1986, which came into effect in 1988 and was introduced by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) with the support of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who is now the Prime Minister.

The main feature of the Act was an age-related system of benefit entitlement. Personal allowances to cover food, bills and other living expenses were generally no longer to be based on need, but instead on age. Young people under 25 received 80 per cent. of the income support that those aged over 25 could receive, while young people aged under 18 were eligible for only 60 per cent. I do not think that we should be treating young people in that way. Changes to board and lodging payments resulted in many people being forced to leave home, and led to them being worse off. The changes have been a major source of homelessness, and all that goes with it.

Young people in London—having survived on less than £20 a week thanks to cuts in the housing benefit system—are living in a state of desperation; not for them expensive clothes, videos and holidays. It is time we changed course. I find it very depressing that the Secretary of State can claim credit for his administration of a social security system that costs a fortune to stop people getting benefits, while poverty, unemployment, misery, bad housing, bad health and shorter life expectancy among the poor increase. We should be more concerned with the needs of the poor than with the apparent threats of the very rich to leave this country if they are taxed at a level that they could well afford.

5.51 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): The speech of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) brought to mind the whole purpose of debates in this place. He and I last sat together in this Chamber agreeing about the need to deal with a particular group of handicapped children, and I am aware of his concern in that matter, but I know, and he knows perfectly well, that, politically, we disagree vehemently. I hope that the Gentleman will be fair and tell his local authority that, if it wants to help the unemployed and the homeless, it should deal with the 1,000 or more empty properties in the borough. Also, if he wishes to be fair about the minimum wage, he should accept that the freedom we have to pay the going market rate is a safety net in itself.

I can give the hon. Gentlemen a local example from north-east London. In 1983, a group of 18 people from Bangladesh were employed in Hackney, where I had the privilege of being a candidate. The case was well known to me at that time. These 18 people from Bangladesh had had an income there of 5 rupees a day, but were being paid in Hackney what the local Labour council believed to be derisory wages. Those 18 people were thrilled to have wages that were 10 times greater than those that they received in Bangladesh. However, they were all put out of work by local regulations which were the basis of the thoughts of the hon. Member for Islington, North. I hope that he will reflect on that—although he will not perhaps agree with me in the end.

On the first day I came to this place, I was told that the worst thing I could do was to think. I have to say that, during the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), I was thinking deeply about her extraordinary rapier thrust early on, that one in five of our people were unemployed. As one knows that there are 23 million were employed people in this country, she has taken the figure of 4 million to be the total number unemployed. She has used the labour force survey figures—not the Government's claimant count or the International Labour Organisation figures, which are slightly higher.

If one believes that more than 4 million people are unemployed, several questions arise which have social security implications and which need answers. If Labour comes to power, will it immediately say that twice the supposed number of people are unemployed? Would it admit that its rhetoric during debates before the election was true? Would it say that 4 million people were unemployed? Would it pay the 2 million people who do not receive unemployment benefit, and who do not receive any of the £8.6 billion spent on unemployment benefit last year? Will that figure be added to the unemployment bill? During the election campaign, we

should say loudly that the figures used by the hon. Lady include the sick, prisoners and others who are not available for work but who, of course, would like to have work. That figure is bogus and should not be used.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I was reluctant to rise, but I feel I must defend my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). She said that one in five non-pensioner households had no one working in that household. She did not talk about 4 million, and the hon. Gentleman cannot deduce that figure from her comments. I raise this simply by way of clarification, so that, if he extends his remarks, he can start from the right premise.

Mr. Booth: I am grateful for that, but my point is made. Labour Members frequently refer to "4 million unemployed"—that is Labour's official stance. There are cost implications attached to such a statement and they cannot just make it.

I came here not to cross swords with either the hon. Member for Islington, North or the hon. Member for Peckham, but to think more widely about social security. I happen to believe that social security is based on a generalisation and, like all generalisations, it is part mythical. The generalisation is that the money to buy social services and to pay benefits is the source itself of social security. That is the handout mythology. Yes, we pay a lot of money and I hope to develop my argument to show how the amount has increased since 1948–49.

I wish to advance today an alternative principle—that we should have not a handout, but a hand-up philosophy. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] If Labour Front Benchers are in accord with this view, so be it. It may well be that there are like minds across the Chamber, but we do not need a handout society any more.

Labour Members often criticise and berate our views on individualism, saying that the individualism that we hold to be an important lever is nothing but selfishness. The Labour party may now share many of our Front-Bench principles, but if it were ever in government—God help us—and tried to implement our policies and, as the weeks went by, had to face the daily problems of government, it would fall back on its original principles. It would not respect the individual because it rejects that view. It believes in state solutions—the sort of solutions that are based on planning and entirely reject the individual contribution. Our social security system should be based on the individual and his dignity. It should also be based on the belief that an individual is responsible to his neighbour—the second commandment.

There is a great need for new ideas. I was moved by a visit to Halifax when I was researching urban regeneration policies. I met a man who told me, "I came from the poorest house I knew of in Lancashire during my childhood. My parents were never employed and we were so poor that we only had a skylight in one room of the accommodation and there was no carpet on the floor. We were grindingly poor, but I did not go out and steal and my parents did not teach me to go to the social security, because there was none at the time. They taught me to see life in terms of honest opportunities." Having made a fortune, he was giving it back. He had bought the derelict Crossley mill and split it up into several hundred units for young, start-up businesses.

At the mill, I met a 22-year-old man who had just bought his second printer. He had a little printing works and was employing his father, who had been unemployed for years, and was taking on his grandfather, who had been unemployed for a generation, that very week. The one thing that he had—it was not money, although he had been able to borrow the money for the machine, but he did not have social security benefits—was that self-same idea. He saw life in terms of opportunity. He was a man changed from within. My argument is that our social security system is not just about handing out money blindly, but about getting ideas to motivate people.

Another person who is seminal to my argument was a 28-year-old lady I met in Bristol, who, on the quotient of disabilities, had every kind of problem. She was from an ethnic background, coming from the Caribbean, a single mother and slightly disabled, and had been unemployed for eight years, but she had had an idea. Her one skill was cleaning and she thought that she could get a contract to clean buildings. She went to Full Employ—incidentally, I hope that that organisation will regenerate itself—which taught her how to start a small business. I met her eight months later, when she was employing two people and cleaning two tower blocks. That is the sort of regeneration of the individual from inside—outside the social security system—that I want. I hope that those two examples make my point adequately.

How do we progress? It is no use the Government preaching, and it is no use talking. We need action in the form of legislation. Legislation cannot tell people what ideas to think, but laws can promote conduct, and conduct can change culture and with that comes the flow of ideas. I shall give another example to prove the point that laws and the changes of laws dramatically affect culture.

I had the privilege of speaking at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Hanover not so long ago, where I met the Prime Minister of Saxony. He told me that there had been a huge flow of his cousins—using the term broadly to mean people from east Germany—into Saxony in the preceding year and that they had been poverty-stricken. He had told his burgermeisters, "We have to help these people." They did. They poured out money for people from east Germany—jobs, money, homes and all the rest.

He said that now those same burgermeisters are waiting outside his room saying, "Look, we cannot use these cousins from the east"—the same race and group, the Germans. They were saying, "They have a problem. They come to work late in the morning, go home early in the afternoon and ask for twice or three times the welfare benefits." We have to look for radical reform in the next generation inside the individual and inside the dependency culture that is created by too many handouts.

I gave an example from abroad, but what about at home? In the past months, unemployment figures have fallen. The Department for Education and Employment has been advised that a large number of people—we do not know how many—who are no longer claiming benefit are being flushed out of the system because it has been discovered that they were claiming wrongly. In other words, fraud is being revealed. That is perhaps an example—we hope so—of a sensible reform introduced by the Government here, which is changing the culture of those people for the better. It is so much better to be doing real work than to be doing fraudulent work or diddling the system.

I said that I would return to the figures, and I shall do so briefly. I have not brought as many figures to the Chamber as did my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), but they are fascinating. In 1948–49,

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£0.6 billion was spent on social security, or 5 per cent. of gross domestic product. By 1979, that figure had grown to £16.9 billion, or nearly double the percentage of GDP at 9.7 per cent. By this year, it had grown to £93.3 billion, which is 13.2 per cent. of GDP. There has been a huge rise in the past 20 years: both Front-Bench spokesmen have agreed on that. Several policy thrusts must result from all this. We must target what we spend.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) is present and may well intervene. In his 1987 reforms, he produced an excellent policy initiative of targeting those in most need. However, we also have to encourage individual dignity as a policy principle and we also need to spend less. We cannot afford to spend so much.

How do we do all that? We have to limit some of the demand-led amounts. We have to tell people that they are entitled to benefit, but that there is a limit. We have to help them by giving them ideas and training, even though that idea has been rejected, or at least, qualified. Training, education and new schools are important. We have to ensure that the sort of benefits that we give people fit what we can afford.

In some areas, benefits should be extended, for example for those with special needs. We get people through to the age of 18, but then they often fall off the end of the cliff. We need to attend to the adult employment of those people who, sadly, cannot enter the mainstream of employment. In that area, we must help voluntary organisations much more proactively.

I am guided by the view that no one is without some talent. We must tailor what we can do to the individual. The Government have an astonishing record on spending, have made an admirable effort to tackle fraud, and have achieved an excellent performance in targeting those most in need. They should now recognise that the dignity of the individual is enhanced not by giving people money but by seeking new ways and ideas to enhance people's talents.

The Government have advanced with foresight on private pension provision. I hope that that foresight, which is a quality peculiar to our Front-Bench team, will go further. The hon. Member for Peckham suggested that we had scored a damp double whammy. That is wrong; we have won a triple trophy. We have not only succeeded in giving greater help to the needy but have more people in work receiving more spending money for their pockets. We have the best peacetime Administration of the past 100 years.

6.10 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): There have been numerous changes to the social security system in recent years. While some have been minor, our social security system has taken a turn for the worse. Its administration has been centralised and become remote.

Benefit claimants face complicated new rules with, at times, little help to cope with them. A recent report by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux called "Short Changed" highlights the harsh reality of some of the Department of Social Security changes. The drive for savings pays no attention to the needs of claimants. That is borne out by the cut in outreach services, which have been withdrawn in some areas. The national free benefits advice line has been closed and smaller benefit offices have been shut down.

Citizens advice bureaux say that contacting benefit offices by telephone is getting worse. Hon. Members have to contact the Benefits Agency on behalf of their constituents and find it difficult to get through and get answers to their queries about new benefits. Written communications are poor; in some cases, they seem to be getting poorer. In several cases in which I have written to the Benefits Agency on behalf of constituents, it has taken too long for me to get a reply. Constituents become worried.

People get letters telling them that they are to be denied benefits. They do not know why and they try to sort it out themselves at a benefit office, if they are lucky and have one to go to. Some claimants do not have one and will not be able to sort things out, so they come to my surgery desperate for help. They do not have any benefit to live on. More and more people face that predicament.

Because of staff shortages, many benefit offices tell people that they must go to an advice agency to get help filling the forms. They say, "We cannot help you; we do not have the time." Advice agencies such as citizens advice bureaux do not have the time or resources, either. They are overstretched. They do not get more money because so many changes have been brought in: incapacity benefit, jobseeker's allowance and the changes in forms and other difficulties. People turn up at advice bureaux that do not have the staff to cope with them. It is increasingly difficult for all advice agencies, because of cuts in Benefits Agency staff.

Claimants need face-to-face contact with someone at a benefit office. Between April and October 1996, 17 Benefits Agency public caller offices were closed and two had their hours reduced. Will the Minister say whether it is true that 17 more are to close in the next six months? If so, that is worrying for face-to-face contact with claimants.

It has been suggested that people could use the telephone if offices are closed. However, many people do not have telephones: 11 per cent. of claimants have no telephone at home. Such people have to go to telephone boxes. If they live in a rural area, there may be only one box. I know from my experience of trying to get through and waiting on the end of the telephone, how difficult it is. When those people wait, they have to put money in all the time. Often, there will be someone outside waiting. If a claimant is holding the line waiting for an answer to a query and not speaking, the person outside will tap on the door, wondering what is happening. It is not fair that offices should close when such claimants need face-to-face contact.

Claimants need explanations of letters and of how to fill in forms. It is difficult to do that without a benefit office to go to. There are also problems for people whose first language is not English. They need face-to-face contact, as do people with hearing or communication difficulties. It is difficult for people with hearing problems to get advice and help. They need a benefit office close by. They do not want to have to travel to another one simply because theirs has been shut. Lipreading is often the only way that such people can understand their claims.

Along with the changes and the closures of benefit offices, we have had harsh changes to social security tribunals. It is less likely that people will attend, or be

represented at, hearings. Oral hearings are held now only if requested by a claimant within 10 days. Before the changes, I understand that people were told that they were entitled to an oral hearing. Now they must somehow find out that they are entitled and ask for one within 10 days.

The minimum period of notice of hearings has been cut from 10 days to seven. That is five working days. The seven days includes the weekend. That will be difficult for advice agencies. In many cases, they will not have time to prepare a case to take to a tribunal. It is therefore less likely that the decision will be overturned—and 44 per cent. of benefit cases that go to tribunals are won on appeal. It is unfair that a change in the system means that people cannot get oral hearings because they do not have time to prepare their appeals. What will happen in future to such people? We must address that problem.

Appeals are a cost to the DSS budget. Why does it not get it right in the first place? Why does it not ensure that enough staff are available, that forms are filled in correctly, and that it gets the adjudication right in the first place and so does not have to go to appeal? The appeal system costs a great deal of money.

In debating the regulations, we must, of course, consider benefit uprating, but we must also consider the hoops through which people must jump to get benefits in the first place. To name one group of people, the social security system fails pensioners: 1 million pensioners do not claim the income-related benefits to which they are entitled. I have often said in the House, and I say it again, that we need a publicity campaign to ensure that pensioners who are entitled to income-related benefits get them.

A few months ago, an old lady on basic state pension came to my advice surgery to thank me. She said, "I don't want to worry you, dear, but I am finding it difficult to manage and I don't know how to cope any more." I asked her what benefits she was receiving and she told me that she was getting her pension. I asked her what she meant by that, and she said that she was receiving the basic state pension that everyone receives. I asked her whether she was receiving income support or housing benefit; she was not getting anything, because she did not know that she had to claim for those benefits. She was paying for her rent and all her other expenses out of the basic state pension. It is no wonder that she could not manage; she had roughly £6 a week to live on after she had paid all her bills. She had been managing on that for years, because she did not know that she was entitled to those benefits.

That case was not an isolated incident. Several of my constituents who are pensioners come to see me and I tell them what they are entitled to—whether it is a war pension or something else. They suddenly realise that they might be able to live at long last—perhaps not as well as one would have hoped, but in much better conditions than they were living in.

We need a publicity campaign. The Government must mount a campaign to tell pensioners what they are entitled to. I know that the Government say that that is a waste of money and that they cannot afford it, but they have already wasted £180,000 on advertising the Child Support Agency in the Greater Manchester area. The advertisement was unnecessary and inaccurate. On 12 February, the Advertising Standards Authority ruled that the advertisement was wrong. It reads:

"Dear Parent,

Even after you pay maintenance you will always have more income if you are in work. Please call."

The advertisement gives a Manchester number, but the advertisement is incorrect and the ASA has asked the Government not to make the claim again. If the ASA is asking the Government not to use the advertisement again, there must be something desperately wrong with it. If the Government can find £180,000 for a campaign in Greater Manchester alone, why cannot they find the money for a campaign to tell pensioners which income-related benefits they are entitled to? It is disgraceful.

These orders and regulations are not controversial and I know that we shall not divide the House on them tonight, but the ones introduced in the Budget were controversial. They included harsh new housing benefit rules and rules stating that people under 60 would have to find multiple-occupancy accommodation, or its equivalent in cost—a bed-sit. In future, if a 58-year-old is made redundant, he or she might have to leave the house in which they have lived all their life. Aged 58, that person will suddenly be told that, because he or she is a single person, they cannot live in that house any more and must move out because of the housing benefit changes. If the rent of the house is more than the multi-occupancy rent, that person will be asked to move out and find something cheaper. If they stay in the house, they will have to try to meet the cost from their income support.

Mr. Burt: Thank you.

Ms Lynne: The Minister nods his head and says, "Thank you." But the income support level is a basic subsistence level; claimants will not be able to afford a little extra to top up their rent. In some cases, claimants might need a lot of extra money to top up their rent.

The Government encouraged landlords to convert their houses into self-contained flats. What will the Government do now? Will they go to those same landlords and say, "Sorry, we made a mistake. You must now reconvert your property from self-contained accommodation to a property with a bathroom and a kitchen that people must share"? Many people cannot share; many people are incapable of sharing. I know that the Minister is well aware of the fact that people with mental health problems will have great difficulty. I know that the proposal is currently before the Social Security Advisory Committee.

I sincerely hope that the Minister will decide that the rule is unfair and will penalise many people whom he would not want to penalise. I know that he is concerned about elderly people, disabled people and those with mental health problems. I hope that he will use his good offices to try to change those draconian rules.

We have heard about the changes for lone parents. The Social Security Advisory Committee is considering those changes. In April 1998, one-parent benefit and lone-parent premium will no longer be available for new claimants. Some 46 per cent. of lone parents are on an income of below £100 a week. One-parent benefit is an in-work benefit; it encourages people to find work. Surely we want to encourage people back to work. Family credit helps, but low-income benefit for one-parent families is important. It is a stepping stone on the road to employment and, in the long term, it cuts the social

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security bill. I am worried about the children. We are talking about taking money away from single parents, and the children will inevitably suffer—they will go deeper into poverty.

I shall now say a few words about the regulations dealing with incapacity benefit. I welcome the fact that exempt income is to rise from £45.50 to £46.50 for voluntary or therapeutic work of under 16 hours a week. I am, however, afraid that many people do not like to take such work because they are not sure of the rules and of what exactly is meant by therapeutic or voluntary work. They are desperately afraid that, if they take any sort of work, their benefits might be cut. The rules must be clarified, so that people are encouraged to take therapeutic work. Many people with ill health or disability want to get back into the work force and take up paid work.

Our benefits system does not adequately address the problem of people with partial incapacity. Last year, I asked a written parliamentary question about the percentage of those claiming incapacity benefit who were doing limited therapeutic or voluntary work. I was told by the Government that the figure was not available, as the cost of providing it was excessive. I do not see why that figure is not available. Surely, if we want to get people back to work—starting with therapeutic work—and cut the social security bill, we should find out how many were doing therapeutic work; we should target them and help them back into full-time work.

I am glad that the Government have backed down on some of their proposals for war pensioners—I do not know why they introduced those proposals in the first place. The Government still remain extremely stubborn about people with hearing loss. The Royal National Institute for the Deaf has said that the Government's proposals will mean that the war disablement pension is awarded only if there is an immediate hearing loss equivalent to that of someone in his 80s. If someone has a 50 decibel hearing loss, he will receive the award. But someone whose hearing loss is less than, for example, 45 decibels will still not receive the war pension—even if, when he gets older, his hearing deteriorates to 55 decibels. I believe that such people are entitled to it.

The Government said that they had new medical evidence. However, in a statement in the other place on 4 February 1997, the Minister of State, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, said:

"My Lords, the open letter which I received from the medical experts concentrated very much on the question of my assertion that there had been a change in medical opinion. As I have explained, I now fully accept that their current view has been held for a long time."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 February 1997; Vol. 577, c. 1529.]

Fortunately, the Minister in the other place changed his mind and acknowledged that the opinion had been held for a long time. If that is so and if the Government are now saying that no new medical evidence has been brought forward, why have they not changed their mind on awarding war pensions to people with hearing loss? If there is no sign of new medical evidence, it would appear that the Government are simply being stubborn and dogmatic on the issue. These people have fought and have given their health for this country and they should be compensated by this country. It is just another example of the way in which the social security system is taking a turn for the worse.

6.29 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I did not agree with everything said by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), which probably comes as a relief to her as it does to me, but she did highlight one especially important area to which I shall return—the position of those who are either on a retirement pension without any other form of income, or on a retirement pension plus income support.

As the debate unfolded, I was struck by its unusual quality. At one stage—much though I love this place—I thought that I would be able to go home early. I came in expecting the cut and thrust of social security debates of past years, but, lo and behold, we were greeted with an assurance at the outset—just to emphasise that the Conservatives set the policy and Labour then adopts it—that there would be no Division. I thought, "That's okay—presumably, we'll all go home early," but it has not worked out that way, and I have a feeling that it will not.

The result is that, instead of having to defend the Conservative position—it has already been conceded—it is legitimate for me to spend a moment or two examining, not the alternatives—it is accepted that there is no alternative to the Conservatives—but the glosses that have been added by Opposition Members.

That is why I so enjoyed the contribution of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), and I say that without a trace of sarcasm. I debated with the hon. Gentleman over several years when we were both members of the Select Committee on Social Security—he thinks I am barking and I know that he is, but the one thing that one can say about him is that he is a man of principle. He brings the unfashionable notion of socialism into the Chamber and puts forward a prospectus for a way of life which, although completely and utterly nuts, is at least consistent. I suspect that, if we looked at his election addresses from every election that he has ever fought, we would see a man who is completely consistent.

It is worth while spending a few moments considering the hon. Gentleman's speech, because it was one of substance—no one would accuse the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) of having made a speech of substance, on this or any other occasion. His speech had some elements that caused some Labour Members to start twitching—it was like hearing those tunes of glory and sounds of battle in which Labour Members once passionately believed, but which have been Mandelsoned out of them.

The hon. Gentleman's key phrase was a statement that is breathtakingly wrong, but sometimes even Conservative Members let such remarks go by the board—presumably because there was so much wrong in the hon. Gentleman's speech that it was difficult to pick out a specific point. The highlight came when he said that the Conservative Government had given money to the rich. The silence among Opposition Members says something about Labour's house training, because when I have used that line in previous years, they have responded, "Oh, but you do give money to the rich." They do not do that now, having been properly stalinised.

The Conservative Government have never given anything to the rich. What they have done—and not before time—is allow the rich to keep more of their own money. When trying to work out how to look after the poorest members of our society, we must never forget

that, when a taxpayer earns his money legally, he owns that money 100 per cent. and every single 1 per cent. deduction taken by the state takes away his money.

The idea that we are in some way giving to the rich—still a popular idea on the Labour Benches—does not accord with the truth. When I said that to the hon. Gentleman, his response was untypical—he had to use the elitist line, "I don't know what university you went to." I suppose that is what happens when one is called Jeremy. I did not go to university, so I cannot take part in an exchange like that.

However, I do know some things. I believe that, in 1986, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) asked the Treasury what proportion of the total tax take was contributed by the top tax payers. One never knows with that hon. Gentleman, but it was such a mistake that I suspect it was done deliberately out of mischief. The answer he got was not one of which the hon. Member for Islington, North would approve—and where he comes from, if facts are disapproved of, they become non-facts—because it showed conclusively that, when tax rates are reduced, the total amount of tax paid by the rich goes up.

Those who have been raised to believe stalinist demonology will ask, "How can that be?" I can tell them how. If people are taxed so much that they end up paying 89 per cent. on earned income and 98 per cent. on unearned income; if an old lady who has the temerity to receive a little income from a building society is told that she has to pay a 15 per cent. investment income surcharge; and if a Government are so strapped for cash—as the Labour Government were in 1968—that they have a special top rate of tax on the higher band of 104 per cent., one starts to discover what people do when faced with taxation like that.

At the end of the day, the hon. Member for Islington, North is a toff, and he knows that the decent thing to do is to stay and pay your tax, but people do not do that, and they did not in the 1960s when we had that penal taxation system. So what do they do? They go abroad, which strikes a chord with recent events, given that we are about to chase popular composers abroad—we do not want them in this country any more. If they do not go abroad, they start to evade tax—or they employ people like me to help them to work out advantageous tax schemes, so it is not all bad.

Finally, what they usually do is stop working. During the 1960s, when I was an articled clerk, I tried to instruct a local barrister, and was asked by his clerk what day of the week the case was being heard. "Thursday," I replied, to which the response was, "Oh no, he doesn't work on a Thursday—surely you know that?" Being deferential, I apologised, put the phone down and went to ask one of the other clerks what was going on. I was told that the barrister never worked on Thursdays or Fridays because he found it was not worth his while; he only worked on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

It is common ground on both sides of the House that, if we are looking for the money to spend on those who really do need help and those at the bottom of the heap who simply cannot look after themselves, we get that money in one of two ways. Either we do it the way the last Labour Government did it—by printing money or telephoning the International Monetary Fund and having it sent over by the planeload, which is not a particularly good idea, as it tends to put a party out of office for at least 18 years and probably longer—or we run the economy in such a way that wealth is generated and we ensure that we have a rate of tax that leaves those who are far more capable than I of earning huge sums of money with sufficient incentive to stay in the country and contribute the taxes that make caring a reality.

That is the way forward, yet there was not a single hint of that in the hon. Gentleman's speech. When he talked about giving money to the rich, and when he denied—although I suspect that he knows it is the truth—that the rich pay more when tax rates go down, it reminded me of Macaulay's comment on the reason the Puritans hated bear baiting: it was not because of the damage to the bear but because of the pleasure it gave to those watching. The hon. Gentleman's comments expressed that sort of feeling.

Running through the hon. Gentleman's speech was the single aspect in which his remarks chimed with those of the Labour Front Benchers: the debate about people living in poverty. One of the most bogus accusations from Labour Members—it really is a cheek—is one we hear every time we increase benefits. They say in the next breath, "But poverty is on the increase." They justify that by saying that, if anybody is on any form of assistance, that automatically means that they must be living in poverty.

By their own bizarre logic, the more they press for increased benefits, the more they produce a dependency culture. They tell people who are receiving a helping hand from the state that they are, in fact, living in poverty. The statistic that shows how daft that argument was quoted by the hon. Member for Islington, North—that 24 per cent. of the people in this country are living in poverty. That is patent and arrant nonsense, and the hon. Gentleman is so far down the left-wing path, he is probably one of the few people in the Chamber who did not realise that it is nonsense.

Mr. McLeish: I wish to explore the hon. Gentleman's claim that the 24 per cent. figure is arrant nonsense. Is he aware that figures published by the Department of Social Security for February 1996 show that 5.8 million people in Britain were claiming income support? The Prime Minister accepts that figure as representative of the poverty level in this country. If we add to it dependants and children, we have a total of about 10 million people who are solely dependent on income support. That amounts to about 20 per cent. of the population. Does he accept the figures provided by the Department?

Mr. Nicholls: The figures speak for themselves, which is why I cited them earlier. I am complaining about the assumption that people must be in poverty because they are in receipt of some form of state benefit. That assumption produces the nonsense that today people are just above the level of income support and are therefore not in poverty, but tomorrow, when a beneficent Government increases support and they are in receipt of income support, they are suddenly catapulted into poverty. That may be useful demonology that allows Labour Members to claim that a quarter of the population is living in poverty, but it does not reflect the real world and people's experiences.

I have devoted some time to the speech by the hon. Member for Islington, North because it merited some examination. The same could not be said for the speech

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by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), which—even by her standards—was an extraordinarily lamentable effort. With stunning naivety, she continued to repeat figures after the Minister had passed her a piece of paper that proved that they were wrong. She then suggested that social services could be funded by the national lottery. One can only imagine what would have happened if we had made that proposal—we would have been derided initially and, in due course, the Opposition would have adopted our policy. Mercifully, it is a daft policy and we will not adopt it—so neither will Labour.

Even worse than the naivety of the hon. Lady's speech, was its sheer brazen cheek. I thought that she would not dare to mention the flexible decade of retirement, as that would be misleading and she would create a false impression of what might happen. However, she then referred to the flexible decade of retirement. Why? It is because it sounds marvellous. Many people would like to have the option of retiring at 60 rather than at 65. Yet what is the real situation?

When the hon. Lady was pressed on the matter, she accepted—as she was trying to be Torier than thou—that there could be no increase in taxation. In a letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, she said:

"We anticipate . . . a lower level of basic state pension".

She then said that she would have to contact the Government Actuary in order to find out exactly what that would mean. In an attempt to be helpful, the Government unearthed the figures for her. It is estimated that the basic pension would have to be reduced by about £20 a week for a single person and by about £37 a week for a couple. That amounts to a retirement tax of about £1,040 a year.

The hon. Lady did not mention that figure. She gave the impression to the outside world not that Labour is just as good as the Tories and would do everything that we do, but that Labour is even better—and she referred to the flexible decade of retirement in that context. One never knows with the hon. Member for Peckham whether it is cheek, naivety or an unattractive combination of the two, but I have to say that her performance was not particularly impressive.

Overall expenditure on social security is absolutely stunning: £15 per person, per day, and £93 billion per year. That is an extraordinary sum by anyone's standards. Even under this Government, the total social security budget was growing faster than the economy's ability to keep up with it. The process of slowing it down had to begin—that is all well and good. At least the latest set of Government reforms will cut about £6 billion from the budget by 2000. Thereafter, the savings should increase to about £15 billion per year.

Some people will say that that is outrageous, and that we should increase taxation for the rich so that we do not have to make savings of that magnitude. However, it is worth while considering who pays retirement pensions. Pensioners often assume that they are entitled to their pensions because they paid into the kitty—it is the problem of the funded and the unfunded schemes. In reality, there are not enough rich people to soak, even if they were prepared to stand around to be soaked.

About 89 per cent. of taxpayers in this country are basic rate taxpayers. Therefore, the moral obligation of maintaining our pensioners will be discharged by the working population: people who, for the most part, pay basic rate tax. The figures are quite interesting: about 3.8 workers support each pensioner at present, but it is estimated that the ratio will decrease to 2.2 workers per pensioner by 2010. It is perfectly obvious that, if we do not rein in social security spending, the burden will become impossible, and could not be shouldered by the working population. That is why it is so important for the Government to encourage people to have their own pensions, and to make it clear that they cannot be dependent on the state.

The hon. Member for Islington, North said that it would be nice if one could live on the retirement pension. It reminded me of the famous statement by the late Vic Feather, that he would not rest until everyone was earning above the national average wage. It is a great aspiration, but it does not stack up. The hon. Gentleman said that that is what occurs in Europe. The problem is that the Governments of Europe have, for the most part, not faced that consequence. In the not too distant future, they will have to deal with an increasingly greying population without proper pension provision.

That is why the single currency is a problem—people like me can always find a read across to the single currency, while remaining entirely in order. If we enter the single currency and our so-called European partners are faced with the reality of having to pay pensions, they would print money—their money, our money; it is common currency—and the inflationary effects would wreak havoc on pension funds in this country. Although the single currency may seem a rather esoteric and boring subject, pensioners up and down the land should ensure that they have a real stake in that debate.

The position is that about 90 per cent. of retirees have some form of pension other than the retirement pension. That is a good thing, which should continue. The Government can take a great deal of the credit for that situation, which makes us a leader in Europe and the envy of Europe. However, I am troubled by one point, about which I have received a great deal of anecdotal evidence. People do not usually come to my surgeries and say, "I am someone who . . . ," but they do say, "I know someone who is living entirely on the retirement pension"—or, almost inevitably today, on that pension topped up with some form of income support.

There are other passported benefits in those circumstances, such as housing benefit, free prescription charges and the rest. However, I do not think that anyone would claim in this day and age that the retirement pension is a massive sum, as clearly it is not.

I have a question for my hon. Friend the Minister who will reply on behalf of the Government. I have not given him notice of my question, so I do not expect him to provide the figures now. However, I would be interested to know—if not tonight, perhaps by letter—whether the Government have any information about the number of retirees who are dependent solely on the retirement pension or on that pension plus income support. I have not been able to identify that figure through the Library. Do people in that position—it may be a sizeable number—suffer an exceptional degree of hardship? Ultimately, an indicator of a decent society is how we care for those who cannot care for themselves in their twilight years. We must examine that issue.

Ms Lynne: The hon. Gentleman obviously realises that 1 million pensioners are not claiming the income-related

benefits to which they are entitled, so they receive only their basis state pension and do not get housing benefit. Does he agree that it is time that an advertising campaign was run to make sure that pensioners are aware of the income-related benefits to which they are entitled?

Mr. Nicholls: I am mostly with the hon. Lady, but we cannot assume that, simply because people are not claiming everything to which they are entitled, they must be living in poverty. I am not privy to whatever claims the Queen Mother makes on the state, for example, but it is just possible that she has not claimed anything other than her retirement pension. One wishes her well, and she is not living in poverty.

The figures need to be examined. I agree with the hon. Lady, and I am conceding no more than we have already conceded, that the Government spend considerable sums advertising the availability of state benefits. I remember—it is a long time ago, so it shows how long that has been going on—playing my part as a Minister in such advertising campaigns.

My final point may sound like an entirely local problem, but it has a national application. In the west country, we have been visited by people who sound as though they are fugitives from "Blue Peter," because they rejoice in the names of Melody, Happy and Swampy. They have spent much time underground, although they are not retired miners trying to relive the old days. They come from outside the area, and, for the most part, have no confidence in the democratic process as represented by environmental inquiries, unless the democratic process happens to accord with their views.

Those people believe that they can claim the benefit of a democratic system when it goes their way, and treat it with complete contempt when it does not. They descend on an area where for years local people have been hoping for a bypass, as it would transform the quality of their lives. There is no hon. Member with a rural seat, and possibly no hon. Member with an urban seat, who has not seen how a well defined and well judged bypass not only enhances the environment, but transforms the life of the local community.

Local people, who at long last have seen the A30 Feniton bypass becoming a reality, suddenly find that a group of people who, for the most part, hold their views in contempt and have taken no trouble to find out why local people wanted the bypass, put the state, in the form of the police and so on, to massive sums of public expenditure to remove them from below the ground.

So far, so good. One listens to such people on the wireless. To say that they do not grasp the argument does not impugn their sincerity. One might take a laissez-faire attitude and ask whether it matters that the police have to spend time getting rid of them. The answer is that it does matter, because it takes those policemen out of my constituency. The worst part is that it is done on state benefits.

I do not know whether there is a ministerial line with which my hon. Friend has been supplied or is about to be supplied. It will contain phrases such as, "Minister cannot be drawn on this. Minister does not have information about individual circumstances. Minister must be careful of confidentiality. Minister, if he is really pressed, can say that this information would be too expensive to obtain."

There are two principal qualifications for Swampy, Melody, Happy and their friends: they must be available for work, and they must be actively seeking work. One is not actively seeking work 25 ft down under the putative Feniton bypass with a steel gate over one's head. That is in no way being available for work. If it is true—I say if, because I do not know for a fact—that initially social security officers were going out on site to hand over the benefits, that is an outrage.

If people want a thoroughly bizarre life style, if they want to live in the community while at the same time reserving to themselves the right to hold in contempt the procedures and principles of that community, in a democratic society they are entitled to do so, but they are not entitled to do so by living off the money that would otherwise go to look after the frail, the helpless and those who genuinely need a helping hand.

This may be a subject for correspondence, rather than being dealt with by my hon. Friend in the debate. If it turns out that people can behave like that when they are in no common-sense way available for work or actively seeking it, and if they are dependent on state benefits, that must stop.

6.54 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) seems to believe that, if one privileges the wealthy, one will have what he calls a decent society. I believe that, until employers value those who work for them and until we design pathways that enable people to proceed from welfare to work, we will not have a wealthy society, and we certainly will not have a just society.

The Secretary of State claimed that the policies that we are debating are designed to encourage people to move into work, but I fear that in reality more people will live in anxiety and hardship, and that they will have little reward for taking up work; in some respects, they may find it harder to stay in work.

The Government propose to remove the 50 per cent. subsidy in housing benefit for the difference between a notional reference rent and the actual rent payable. They also propose to restrict housing benefit for single people under the age of 60 without children to single-room rent levels.

That policy will hit large numbers of people who are unemployed or disabled, carers looking after people in another household, widows, as my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) stressed, and people who are separated or divorced and do not have their children with them.

We know from a parliamentary answer that 430,000 people under 60 in single-person households are renting in the private sector, but only 70,000 of those are in single non-self-contained rooms. It follows, therefore, that some 360,000 people will be threatened by that policy and will experience apprehension, difficulty and a deterioration in the quality of their lives. Their homes represent their security, dignity and privacy, and the possibility of having some control over their lives.

It reflects a harshness and a lack of humane imagination that the Government are willing to deprive people in middle life, living by themselves on modest incomes, but probably making a valuable contribution to society in

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activities such as nursing, caring or teaching. Such people are to lose their homes. That is extraordinarily harsh. I hope that the Government are still prepared to think again.

Single people have fared worse than others in recent years. They are disadvantaged in the housing market. They wait for long periods, and may wait interminably, on waiting lists. They find it harder to service the cost of mortgages. The policy that the Government are introducing will ensure that single people stay in relative difficulty.

Relative poverty matters. The failure of the Conservative party to understand imaginatively how people feel about relative poverty and the widening inequalities that have become apparent may explain why there is such disillusionment with the Conservative party.

The policy previously applied to people under 25, restricting their housing benefit to cover only the cost of shared accommodation. The Government justify their extension of that to people under 60 on the grounds of consistency and fairness. Last year, however, when they sought to justify the reduction in housing benefit for single people under 25, they claimed that it was acceptable and appropriate because single people under 25 were in different circumstances in life—they were at a stage of life when they would have more flexibility. The Government cannot have it both ways, and shifting their ground in such a way constitutes a mockery.

Moreover, the Government are extending the policy up the age range to cover people aged between 25 and 60, without, as yet, having evaluated the impact on those under 25. I suspect that they felt impelled to go further because the existing policy had not helped their fiscal position as much as they had hoped. Even before seeing reports on the impact of the policy, however, we can be pretty sure that supply will fail to match demand: there simply will not be the amount of non-self-contained property available for rent that the policy assumes. Rents will rise, and the Government will receive little, if any, fiscal gain. They will merely have caused hardship.

Disabled people are likely to suffer particularly as a result of the restriction of housing benefit, because they may need more living space than others. They may need wheelchair-accessible homes, and space in which to store equipment. The Government should have considered that problem. As it is, they have dithered over the proposal to extend part M of the building regulations to private accommodation, although there are some very good models that they—along with local authorities and developers—could use. The "lifetime homes development" on the Woodlands estate, developed by the Rowntree Trust on the outskirts of York, shows that it is possible to produce beautifully designed housing that is accessible to disabled people—housing in which people can remain throughout their lives—at a minimal additional unit cost. The Government should give a lead, because there is currently an appalling shortage of accessible homes. There are about 80,000 at present, but there are 4.5 million people with mobility problems.

As things are now to be, disabled people will have to leave homes that they have had specially adapted, because they will no longer be able to afford the rents. A disabled facilities grant may have helped to pay for the adaptations, but apparently that money is to be written off. The policy means that fewer disabled people will be able to live independently, as they wish and ought to be helped to do, and it makes a mockery of the Government's professions in regard to care in the community. It makes one wonder why they introduced legislation to allow social services departments to make direct cash payments to disabled people so that they could manage their own personal and domestic assistance. If those people do not have the means to pay the rent, they will not be well placed to organise their households.

I believe that the policy is, if not in breach of the letter, certainly a violation of the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. In effect, it constitutes an indirect discrimination, because it will exclude disabled people from renting in the private sector. The Government make some discretionary funds available to enable councils to provide help in certain limited circumstances, but even in that regard they have tightened the rules governing eligibility to benefit. Instead of talking of "vulnerable groups" who may be able to benefit from those discretionary funds, they talk of people being in "exceptional hardship".

The Government have not required information about the availability of those discretionary funds to be supplied to disabled people. They have not thought about helping people who may need assistance so that they can negotiate to obtain support. At the very least, there should be a clear instruction to those who administer housing benefit to ignore income from disability benefits that have been provided to cover expenses other than housing costs. I understand that no such instruction has been forthcoming so far.

The Government's housing benefit policies will also introduce new disincentives to work. If a person loses his job, the review of his housing benefit will be brought forward. The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) mentioned that a person in those circumstances would be allowed to retain his previous level of housing benefit for 13 weeks, but thereafter there will be a review and the housing benefit will be cut. The new policy will be a real deterrent to people who might be minded to take temporary work or, perhaps, to try out some new kind of employment in an experimental way. It will deter those who are prepared to risk taking on a job that they realise may be insecure. Such people will feel less confident, because they will know that, if things do not work out, their housing benefit will be reduced sooner than it would have been otherwise.

The policy, then, discriminates against not only disabled people but the unemployed. It will be impoverishing, because people will lose not only their jobs but their homes. The ethos is that, the poorer people are, the less they should get.

The freezing of lone-parent benefits is a triumph of harsh moralism over humanity, and of dogma over realism. The Government's assertion that the social security system favours one-parent families does not stand up, and the common sense that tells us all that that is not so is supported by scrupulous research carried out by the Policy Studies Institute—the research of Berthoud and Ford, published in their paper "Relative Needs". In 1992, 78 per cent. of children in lone-parent families were living on or below income support levels, compared with only 18 per cent. in two-parent families. The Government's own publication "Households Below Average Income" tells us that lone parents constitute 11 per cent. of those

in the bottom income decile, but only 6 per cent. of the population. There is clearly disproportionate poverty among lone parents under the existing social security system.

Reducing one-parent benefit will again reduce incentives to work. It is a non-means-tested benefit, which a lone parent is able to claim in full when in work. Far from being tilted in favour of lone-parent families, the benefits system is tilted against them in certain important respects. In the case of jobseeker's allowance and income support, the claimant's partner can work 24 hours a week, but a lone parent can work only 16 hours a week on income support. At the very least, the Secretary of State should suspend the changes until he has seen the results of further research. He has acknowledged that the research that has been done is not definitive or conclusive in all respects. Proper research should be carried out before he embarks on any reduction in benefits, or in the relative value of benefits for lone parents as opposed to couples.

That is particularly important, given all the evidence that income support is not sufficient to meet children's basic needs. The Child Poverty Action Group's publication "Cost of a Child" makes that abundantly clear. We need a strategy to assist lone parents to move into work. We need a reform of benefits, and, of course, we need the provision of affordable, good-quality child care. The Department's own research—contained in "Moving Off Income Support", by Shaw and others—shows that lack of child care is the real barrier preventing lone parents from going to work. A high proportion want to do so, properly and naturally, although some will feel that, during this phase in their lives, their first commitment should be to home and children. Many both want and need to work. Two thirds of them say that the cost of child care is the real problem that prevents them from achieving that.

Lone parents also face other problems. They are rather more liable to lack educational qualifications. Because of their situation, they are more likely to lack recent work experience, and they run into the difficulty that, as yet, all too few employers are family-friendly in their employment practices. Faced with all those difficulties, lone parents need imaginative policies to help them to get into work, to have higher incomes, to float their households off poverty, and also to increase their opportunities to participate in and to contribute to society.

The Government will say that the child care disregard in family credit is the solution to the problem, but only 25,000 lone parents benefit from it. The lowest-paid on the maximum family credit gain nothing from the disregard, as they cannot receive more than the maximum benefit. The disregard does not apply to children over 11. Often, lone parents cannot take advantage of the disregard because they are, understandably, required to use approved child care facilities, which often are not available in the hours when lone parents need them if they are looking to do shift work, or evening or weekend work. Much more thought and imagination need to go into assisting lone parents in that regard.

Lone parents who are unable to work more than 16 hours have no child care disregard at all on income support. The earnings disregard on income support has been frozen since 1988 at £15. It has been shown by the Department's research to be too low to offer any incentive for lone parents to try out work. As an early priority when resources can be found, the Government should raise that disregard to £25, bringing it into line with the disregard on housing benefit—the amount that working lone parents on housing benefit can earn before their benefit is reduced.

The Government should also redress another anomaly—this time to the disadvantage of couples—that they have created between lone parents and couples. Today, one in five households of working age in Britain have no one in work, as my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham reminded the House, and I share her anger about that. The £15 disregard for long-term claimant couples under 60 has been reduced by the Government to £10. Is that all that they can offer the one in five families who are out of work—to cut the amount that people can earn before they begin to lose benefit?

The entitlement for people who previously received invalidity benefit has been frozen for two years, so they are that much poorer because of inflation in that period. New claimants are on lower benefits, and the Government aim to save £3 billion by 2000. The Government have to recognise, however, that almost everyone in receipt of incapacity benefits has passed the all-work test. The Government cannot then claim that such people are the malingerers, the lead swingers, the workshy of their mythology, about which we heard so much when the Government introduced the incapacity benefit legislation.

The Government claim—the Secretary of State said it this afternoon—that they are focusing benefit on those who are genuinely unable to work. How can that be so if they are making reduced payments to those who have passed the all-work test and are demonstrably unable to work? Instead of removing entitlement and reducing incomes, they should concentrate on encouraging and helping incapacity benefit claimants to try out work.

That could be done, for example, by relaxing the linking rules, so that people can have more confidence to try out a new job, in the knowledge that if, for good reason, it does not work out, they will still be able to return within a reasonable time to their previous level of benefit. At the moment, they have only eight weeks in which to take that risk. That is not enough, particularly for disabled people, who are bound to find it harder to explore the job market, and face greater difficulties in finding work that is appropriate for them.

The Government should also, as the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) argued, be more generous in the provision that they allow for people to undertake therapeutic work. At minimal cost, such reforms could be introduced, and it would quickly save benefit expenditure.

The Secretary of State said that the Government are proud of the provision that they are making in social security, yet one cannot but feel that the Conservative party is resentful of the money that is spent in this way. Claimants are certainly made to feel unworthy, and are stigmatised. The vast extension of means-tested benefits—the proportion of the social security budget that now goes on means-tested benefits has doubled—means an extension not only of stigma but of poverty traps and a multiplication of disincentives.

The hon. Member for Havant claimed that the Government's policies have been scientifically designed—he offered to give a whole range of examples—to enable people better to get into work, but if the means-tested benefits proportion of the social security budget has been doubled, it is hardly likely that incentives to work have been improved and that it has been made easier for people to work.

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

We need a constructive and generous vision of a modernised welfare state, but for that we shall have to wait for a Labour Government. I hope and trust that we shall not have to wait long.

7.16 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I do not accept—neither, I am sure, do other Conservative Members—the criticism just uttered by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who was, after all, elected to the House as a Conservative Member of Parliament. In my view, if he wanted to have the authority to speak on behalf of his constituents, he should have called a by-election. Had he done so, of course, he would have been defeated. He has, I fear, no authority in the House.

I had not intended to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, until I heard the fairly extraordinary speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). It is a pity that she has just left the Chamber. It seemed that she exposed and set out quite a dramatic change on Labour's policy on social security in 1997 and, we assume, as far as the election.

When I last spoke on social security about a year ago, I raised the issue of the earnings uprating of pensions—a matter on which, at every election, when I was Secretary of State for Social Services, I was attacked by the Opposition. I was attacked in 1983 and 1987. I was told that the Government were being far too mean and were not showing sufficient regard to elderly people. In 1992, the same attack was deployed once more. When I suggested a year ago that the Labour party was in the process of changing its policy to the policy that the Government had pursued, I was accused of scaremongering.

Just in case the hon. Lady's words were not quite understood—she read out a formula that had no doubt been put before her by another member of the shadow Cabinet—I point out that she confirmed that the Labour party has abandoned its pledge on the earnings upratings of pensions. There is no question about that. It is one of the most massive U-turns in social policy that I can remember in the past 25 years. I now know why she has disappeared, but if another Labour Front Bencher wants to deny that I will happily give way. Labour Members know that their policy has changed. I do not understand why they do not come clean and admit it openly, so that the public know where they stand.

The debate, including the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham, has been fascinating and significant, because it has shown that the Labour party has come to our position on the uprating of the basic pension. It has also come to our way of thinking on the whole pensions area. That is what the hon. Lady's speech implied.

When I reformed pensions in 1985-86, I was fought all the way by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—I do not know what has happened to him—and others in the Labour party. I was told that the state earnings-related pension scheme was sacrosanct and could not be changed. We believed that the public wanted a pension that they could call their own, not just a pay-as-you-go scheme, such as the state earnings-related scheme, which is not a funded scheme. The public wanted a funded scheme of their own. We wanted to retain the basic pension, but we argued for an occupational or personal pension scheme as a second tier.

At that time, various things were wrong with occupational pension schemes, so we reformed them. Early leavers were a problem, for example. We also wanted to provide other options. Occupational pension schemes covered a vast number of people, but they had not increased over the years. We wanted to give the public the further option of a personal pension. We thought that that was right and sensible. Our policy has been followed and is held up as an example in other countries.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: Let me finish this point.

The marketing of personal pensions occurred after I had left the Department, and was popular with the public. The concept of personal pensions was excellent and was widely supported.

Mr. Denham: Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to apologise to the House for the fact that millions of people are now having to have their pensions policies reviewed because of misselling? Was misselling part of the concept, or merely something that went disastrously wrong?

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman takes me on to the point that I was about to make. I do not defend the misselling of pensions. Companies missold those pensions: it was nothing to do with the Government. It is usually wrong to advise someone in an occupational scheme—

Mr. Denham *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: Before the hon. Gentleman intervenes again, he should let me finish my reply.

It is usually wrong to advise someone in an occupational scheme to move to a personal pension, for the simple reason that the employer makes a large contribution to an occupational scheme. When that advice has been given, it has often been wrong. There have not been millions of cases, but pensions have been missold.

The difference between that misselling and the mistakes that were made in the past on state pensions is that the problem of misselling is being put right. It is perhaps being put right slowly—too slowly, some may argue—but it is being put right, unlike the mistakes to which I shall refer in a moment.

Mr. Denham: Does the right hon. Gentleman feel no sense of embarrassment about the Government advertisements that showed, for example, someone upside down in a straitjacket promoting personal pensions and saying, "Now you are free to leave your employer's pension scheme"? Does he feel no embarrassment about the fact that the Government created the environment in which misselling took place?

Sir Norman Fowler: I do not feel embarrassed about that, or about giving the option of personal pensions to millions of people. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that

some companies missold personal pensions, I agree with him. That is being put right. The worst scandal in pensions in the past 25 years had nothing to do with personal pensions: it was committed by a Labour Government. It was committed by Barbara Castle, and was a total fraud on pensioners and on the public at large.

When inflation was coming down, Barbara Castle changed the method of uprating: she went from the historic to the forecast. Guess what? In current money, that saved between £1 billion and £2 billion. That money has been lost to pensioners permanently. I invite the hon. Gentleman to return to the Dispatch Box and give us a pledge that when or if Labour is returned to power, he will restore that, £1.5 billion to pensioners. Is that Labour's policy? I hear no reply and I see no movement, apart from an embarrassed shuffle. He knows perfectly well that what I am saying is absolutely true.

Mr. Denham: Let us get the record straight. The basic state pension increased in value under the last Labour Government by 18 per cent. in real terms. That is the true record of the Labour Government.

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman has missed the point. I am well aware of the line taken in press releases issued by Transport house, Walworth road or wherever the Labour party is now. The Labour Government fiddled pensions. They made public spending savings of more than £1 billion. No one seriously disputes that—everyone knows that it is true. It is in Barbara Castle's autobiography, it is in Denis Healey's biography and it is a simple matter of common knowledge. The difference is that the difficulty over personal pensions is being put right, whereas that mistake has not been put right, and, to judge by the embarrassed silence among Opposition Front Benchers, it never will be put right.

It is a pity that the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) is no longer present. I hope that both Opposition parties will agree that the real lesson to be learned from the misselling of pensions is that the public need far better and more extensive independent advice on pensions. If we give more options, advice should go with them. There should also be advice from the Department of Social Security. I am concerned when people come to my advice surgery having made decisions about social security and pension benefits that are obviously wrong and not in their interests. The problem of how to advise the public should be re-examined, and much more should be done in the public and private sectors.

The debate is now on new ground. I am beginning to understand Labour's policies step by step: in each debate another veil is lifted. Despite the huffing and puffing of the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), Labour has no intention of abolishing personal pensions. When I was reforming the pension system, I would have preferred to scrap the state earnings-related pension scheme. Such a pay-as-you-go system simply creates a debt for future generations. I wanted a system that we could afford. Every analysis of pensions in Europe points to the British system as affordable compared with virtually every other European system. We must obviously meet the obligations that we have already made; there is no question of not doing so. In the future, however, I would move away from the pay-as-you-go, state earnings-related pension scheme.

Mr. Denham: When is the Secretary of State going to do that?

Sir Norman Fowler: Before the hon. Gentleman asks my right hon. Friend whether he will do that, I had better ask the hon. Gentleman the same question. I had assumed that traditional Labour party policy was to defend SERPS to the death. That is what Labour Members have been saying year after year. The hon. Member for Oldham, West certainly said that, and so did his successors.

The hon. Member for Peckham, however, said—I think that I took her words down accurately—that, if there were a Labour Government, they would want to introduce "a funded second-tier scheme". SERPS is of course not a funded scheme, so either we shall have SERPS as well as a state-funded scheme or Labour is also considering abolishing SERPS. The way in which the debate has gone is extraordinary. I am not entirely clear where the Opposition stand on SERPS. I frankly doubt very much whether they are very clear.

Mr. Denham: It is perfectly clear from all our policy documents that we will retain SERPS as an option for those who wish to remain in it.

Sir Norman Fowler: Does that apply to new entrants to SERPS?

Mr. Denham: Answer the question.

Sir Norman Fowler: Everyone will maintain SERPS for those who are already in it. No one would go back on the obligation. I am asking what future policy will be.

Mr. Denham: We will retain SERPS for those who wish to be members of it.

Sir Norman Fowler: I take that as an undertaking that SERPS will go on for ever more for those who wish to be in it. That can be the only interpretation of what the hon. Gentleman has said. Labour is therefore setting out not one, not two, but three state schemes: the basic pension scheme—which even Labour would not touch—SERPS and a funded state scheme. Labour Members are getting into the most hopeless muddle on pensions, so I shall allow them to try to reconcile those differences.

I want to take up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), about which I hope there might be some agreement across the House. I say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that I hope that we will take the opportunity to move forward on the second-tier scheme. I hope that we will change our policy in very much the way that I set out in the middle 1980s. I think that we have been given the green light for change and can honestly say that the teething troubles of personal pensions are over, that the system works and that the regulations are in place. I very much hope that we can therefore do the decent and sensible thing and get rid of the remnants of SERPS.

I also hope, as my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge said, that we can find a way of getting extra resources to people who are perhaps in their eighties or

[Sir Norman Fowler]

even older and, through no fault of their own, since there was no occupational pension scheme for them to join, are living on the basic state pension. The system that I have set out in the past and advocate again is one of pension credit, which is very much like family credit and would add to the basic pension. It would obviously not apply to everybody. If someone has a perfectly adequate occupational pension, they will not be affected, but if they have not, they could receive extra income. It would apply to people who have not had the benefit of the occupational pension reforms that I hope are now a matter of common agreement across the Chamber. That is my specific plea to my right hon. Friend.

The general point that I want to make is more political. The Government have won the argument on pensions. I do not think that there is any doubt about that. When one listens to Opposition Members, one realises that we have won the argument. Indeed, I think that we have won the argument on social security generally. With the exception of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)—who I think disagrees more with his own Front Benchers than he does with the Government—most people accept that family credit, for example, is a sensible, good way in which to get help to low-income families in work. It has helped substantially and, as the person who introduced it, I am delighted at the take-up.

I find the Opposition's stance on child benefit extraordinary. To withdraw child benefit from 16 to 18-year-olds is one of the most eccentric, silly and counter-productive policies that I have heard of in a very long time. If it goes ahead, I suspect that we would be the only country in the western world where no provision at all is made for that group of children and their parents either through the tax system or the social security system. I cannot imagine that that is precisely what Labour wants to propose, but it will undoubtedly be the impact and the effect of such a policy.

As child benefit took the place of a tax allowance, it would be extraordinary if it were abolished and nothing were put in its place. I do not understand the policy; I find it extraordinary. Surely it is a matter of common consent that the extra expense of children, which lies at the foundation of child benefit, does not suddenly end when children reach the age of 16. Indeed, one could argue pretty strongly that the expense of children rises radically between the ages of 16 and 18. I hope that we hear a defence of that policy. I may not have been listening closely enough to the hon. Member for Peckham, but I did not think that she did the argument justice. In fact, I am not sure that she dealt with it at all.

The Government will enter the forthcoming debates on social security in the strongest possible position. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for creating the strongest possible position on social security. We have the strongest possible position on pensions. We have substantial achievements to our names. The Labour party will spend its time on the defensive, answering anxious questions—not least from its own supporters—on subjects ranging from pensions policy to child benefit. I have great and continuing interest in social security and pensions, but I am also a politician, so I am very much looking forward to the next few weeks and the debates to come.

7.38 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I agree entirely with the last comment of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler).

The Government have not explained why, as this Conservative Administration comes to an end, spending on poverty and unemployment is much greater than it was when it came into office. There are two possible reasons. One is that the Government might have been extremely generous with benefits, increasing unemployment benefit, increasing pensions in real terms and increasing other benefits. The only other possible explanation is that poverty and unemployment are greater than when the Government came into office.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has come back to the Chamber. He described eloquently the Government's strategy to reduce unemployment benefit relative to average earnings. There was a clear Government policy that there would be no real increase in unemployment benefit. In relation to average earnings, the income of those dependent on unemployment-related benefits is worth a lot less in relation to average earnings than 20 years ago—about 50 per cent. less.

I note in passing that the justification given by the hon. Member for Havant was that that policy would encourage people to go to work. The Government's policy for tackling unemployment was to cut benefits. I intervened on the hon. Gentleman to ask whether he could name a year—just one year—since 1979 when unemployment, according to the Government's claimant count, had been lower than the figure that they inherited. I was surprised that the hon. Gentleman, who has been referred to as Mr. Two Brains by his close friends, could not think of one. It is possible that he does not realise that the reason that he could not think of a year is that there has not been a year since 1979 in which recorded unemployment has been lower than the level inherited by the Conservatives.

The Government have fiddled the definition 30-odd times. On all but one occasion, the change has reduced the figure. However, in not one year since 1979 has unemployment been lower than the level inherited. In most years, it has been between 2 million and 3 million—two or three times the level inherited from the last Labour Government. The staggering incompetence of the early 1980s that put unemployment up to 3 million for five years and the equally staggering incompetence in the early 1990s that again got unemployment back to 3 million merely confirm my point.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman tossed out a challenge to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) during his speech. Perhaps I could toss out a challenge to him: can he name one Labour Government that left office with unemployment lower than when they came to power?

Mr. Berry: As the Minister well knows, when the last Labour Government left office, unemployment was falling. My constituents in Kingswood would find it astonishing that Conservative Members are so complacent

and self-satisfied about their performance on unemployment that they think that it is a bit of a joke that in not one year since 1979 has recorded unemployment been lower than the level inherited and that, for most of that time, unemployment has been between 2 million and 3 million. To get figures like that, we have to go back to the 1920s and 1930s, when similar policies were being pursued.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Berry: I should like to progress, if I may.

The hon. Member for Havant has confirmed that it was Government policy to ensure that unemployment-related benefits fell way behind average earnings. The fact that that did not bring unemployment down suggests the obvious conclusion that some people are caught in the poverty trap with the highest effective marginal rate of tax in the country. If they were to take up employment and lost benefits, they would pay an effective marginal rate of tax of more than 100 per cent. Those are the high marginal rate taxpayers whom I am worried about. For most people, it is absurd and insulting to suggest, after the massive cuts in unemployment benefit in relation to average earnings, that unemployment has increased dramatically because people have had no incentive to work. They are not in jobs because the jobs have not been there.

We all know that the Government can hardly claim to have been generous on pensions. I enjoy reading books occasionally. I hope that other hon. Members are reading a book called "Sleaze". That interesting book gives an account of how much somebody spent to stay at the Paris Ritz for five days. That sum accords roughly with what pensioners living on the state pension receive in a year. State pensions are not particularly generous when compared with what some people are quite happy to spend—whoever picks up the bill—at the Paris Ritz. The Government have broken the pensions link with earnings and cut the value of the state earnings-related pension scheme.

Will the Government be leaving office spending more on poverty and unemployment because of improved benefits? Self-evidently, that is not the case. The bill is higher because poverty and unemployment are more widespread. We could spend all evening considering definitions of poverty. I have no intention of doing that. It is incontrovertible that inequality and relative poverty have increased dramatically under the Government.

Commentators commonly use the number of households living on an income after housing of less than half average income as an indicator. The proportion of the population in that position has trebled to one in four. We can quibble about whether that is a sensible definition of poverty, but there are probably not many hon. Members who live in that position. Few Conservative Members have probably ever been in that position. The fact that the number of people suffering from relative deprivation on that scale has trebled under the Conservatives should leave the Government far from complacent, as they have been this afternoon. The number of people dependent on means-tested benefits has doubled to one in six, and one pensioner in three are dependent on means-tested benefits.

My criticism of the comments of the hon. Member for Havant relate not only to issues that I have already covered. Unemployment has increased dramatically despite serious cuts in unemployment-related benefits. The hon. Gentleman argued that, as unemployment benefit is only a small proportion—about 10 per cent.—of the social security budget, reducing unemployment is not a significant way of saving money. He forgot to mention that unemployed people not only receive unemployment-related benefits, but pay less tax. Because they are poorer, they pay less income tax and less indirect tax.

The Treasury has confirmed time and again that the cost to the taxpayer of each unemployed person is about £10,000. Given that unemployment has been between 2 million and 3 million for most of the time under the Tories, we are talking about an annual cost to the Exchequer of between £20 billion and £30 billion. That is not peanuts—it is a substantial economic cost.

The problem is not just that such levels of unemployment cause enormous personal hardship, enormous social divisions, ill health, crime and all the rest, but that they generate a huge burden for the Treasury. For the hon. Member for Havant to imply that part of the problem with the social security budget and paying for decent benefits is not related to unemployment is absurd. That bill of between £20 billion to £30 billion each year is the reason why Labour Members believe that bringing down unemployment is a prerequisite for tackling the high level of social security spending. Any policy that significantly reduces unemployment will also bring savings for the taxpayer.

I am, unapologetically, a strong supporter of the windfall levy on the privatised utilities, which have made excess profits because of the Government's lax price-control regime. The majority of people believe that it is desirable to use that levy to fund employment, training and education programmes for young, unemployed people. If we get 750,000 young people off the dole, we would save on social security payments and such measures are the only way to meet the twin challenge of tackling unemployment and reducing the social security budget.

Clearly, the Conservatives regard allowing privatised utilities to retain excess profits as a higher priority than giving young people the opportunity of work, training and education. We do not, and, more importantly, nor do the majority of people in this country. The reason why spending on poverty and unemployment has increased under the Tories is not because they have been more generous. They never are. It is because unemployment and poverty are higher now than when the Tories came to office, and that is a good reason to ensure that they are removed from office as quickly as possible.

7.51 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) conveniently overlooked the fact that any possible beneficial effect from extra resources for education and training from a so-called windfall tax would be outweighed by the costs that Labour would impose on employers—the minimum wage and the social chapter—which would destroy jobs. He also conveniently overlooked the fact that unemployment is now falling faster than at any time since the second world war when records began.

As a result of the Government's economic policies, unemployment is below 2 million and falling dramatically. That is having an effect on the social

[Mr. Tim Smith]

security budget, but the main reason for the huge increase in the budget in the past 18 years has nothing to do with the level of unemployment. It is largely due to demographic changes and a huge increase in the number of pensioners. People are, thankfully, living longer, and the cost of retirement pensions, which are contributory benefits, has risen substantially. The net result is that we are today being asked to approve a social security budget of £93 billion, or some 13 per cent. of gross national product.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) told us what the social security budget was in 1948, when the present arrangements were introduced, and at various dates since. Until my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security was appointed in 1992, the figures were rising. It is difficult to stop that happening, but we must try, because we cannot expect the working population to bear that huge cost. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State because he has found ways at the margin to reduce social security spending which, by 2000, will be worth some £6 billion and, in the long term, some £15 billion. All those changes have been opposed by Labour Members.

The Leader of the Opposition said recently that he wants to spend more money on education—few hon. Members would not like more resources devoted to our schools. He said that he would release money for education by cutting the welfare budget, because the shadow Chancellor has made it clear that there would be no increase in public spending if we were unfortunate enough ever to have a Labour Government. The Leader of the Opposition did not specify what he would reduce to increase spending on education, but Labour Members today have said the reductions in the orders are not acceptable and should be resisted, even though the reductions have already been built into the budget and will be implemented after the general election. That is not good enough, and people are entitled to ask where the money will come from.

The Government's record is outstanding, especially on pensioners, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) mentioned. Of course there are exceptions, but most pensioners are much better off today. Nearly 90 per cent. of pensioners retiring today have some other form of income apart from the basic state pension. Many have an occupational pension or an earnings-related, pension and some have investment income. The performance of those pensions in the past 18 years has transformed the position of pensioners and we are in a far stronger position than any other member of the European Union, especially in relation to any contingent liability.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield was right to say that—although we remain committed to the basic state pension, which is important—we should ask people to provide their second pension themselves. That is the way to ensure that we do not have massive public expenditure commitments in the future.

The establishment of the Benefits Agency as an executive agency in the Department of Social Security is another reform that has been beneficial. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) was critical of the Benefits Agency, but I recall the situation some 10 or 12 years ago when customer service was not a priority for staff of social security offices. Today, the staff serve their customers well, they care about the recipients of benefits, and the service has improved. The performance targets for quality of service have sharpened up their approach. Of course there is always room for improvement, but the reform so far is welcome.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield mentioned the establishment of personal pensions. He was a little modest, because he introduced that reform, but I remember how controversial and radical that proposal was, and how much opposition to it came from the Labour party and others. Today, the situation is transformed and personal pensions are extremely popular, notwithstanding the misselling about which we have heard. Millions of people have pensions and they have a good idea of what their fund is worth. The funds are portable and people can work out what they will receive in the future.

We have made many radical changes and we are starting to live within our means in terms of the social security budget. I welcome the fact that more effort has been put into ensuring that benefits are paid only to those who are entitled to them. The National Audit Office recently published a report that qualified the national insurance fund account on that score. None the less, the figures are pretty good now. For example, unemployment benefit costs us £1,100 million a year and the National Audit Office found that the total level of mistakes made by the Department was less than 3 per cent. There is always room for improvement. Mistakes should be eliminated and fraud tackled. The record in that respect, too, is much better than it used to be.

The other side of the equation is contributions and the Contributions Agency. Just as it was sensible to have a Benefits Agency with the task of ensuring that benefits are paid efficiently to those entitled to them, so it is sensible to have, within the Department of Social Security, a separate agency with the job of collecting contributions. It is just as important as the collection of income tax by the Inland Revenue.

One matter that I wish to draw to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister has concerned me for some time. It relates to schemes designed to avoid the payment of national insurance contributions. It seems astonishing that it is not possible to legislate, in the same way as we do for income tax, so that if someone is paid not in cash but in kind, he or she will still be subject to national insurance contributions. If someone is given by his or her employer as part of a remuneration package a benefit in kind, he or she is taxed on it. Nobody disputes the equity of that; it must be the sensible approach. It is all-encompassing and it is how income tax works.

However, when it comes to national insurance contributions, it is rather different. In an article in a magazine called the *London Accountant* dated December 1996 to January 1997, the author explains how to make a 20 per cent. tax saving through partly paying employees in supermarket vouchers. Supermarket vouchers are pretty close to cash. If somebody is given a voucher exchangeable at Tesco, Sainsbury or Asda, it resembles payment in cash. The article says:

"There does remain the possibility of achieving an effective 20 per cent. tax saving . . . by converting a proportion of an employee's cash salary entitlement into an entitlement to supermarket vouchers."

In some areas, the Department has tightened up on that, and the author of the article refers to some of those. He says:

"Certain benefits, however, are liable to NIC as a result of special legislation."

He lists those as

"vouchers . . . denominated in, and exchangeable for, cash (eg. premium bonds);

commodities for which there is an organised market (eg. gold);

and

certain financial instruments (eg. gilts and unit trusts)."

So if employees are paid in those, employer and employees must pay national insurance contributions.

However, according to the author of the article, if an employer decides to pay his employees in supermarket vouchers and those are not part of the remuneration—an employer can simply say that they are not—the employer can simply reduce a package of, for example, £18,000 per annum to £17,000 with the addition of £1,000 in vouchers. He says that that is how the scheme works. I do not know whether what the author says is true, but a two-page article is devoted to it—*[Interruption.]* I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Minister is offering to look at it.

Instead of tackling each avoidance measure as it arises, the time has come to introduce a measure whereby it will not matter what scheme is used. Given that supermarket vouchers will be taxed as income, why could not the Department of Social Security introduce a similar measure whereby, no matter what the form of so-called "remuneration" was—supermarket vouchers or any other clever idea—it would be subject to national insurance contributions? It is time to put an end to those schemes. I have raised this general matter on a number of occasions and am concerned that we still have not tackled it.

Subject to my hon. Friend looking at that problem, as I know he will, I welcome the orders before us today and the increase in benefits. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the work that he has been doing to control the scale of the social security budget.

8.4 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am pleased that the debate about lone parents has now moved on to more positive ground—certainly more positive than that delineated by the Secretary of State some years ago, when he made a disgraceful speech to the Conservative party conference about his "little list". He emphasised the number of single women who allegedly had babies in order to get council flats and houses. That was a disgraceful attack.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: I shall not give way at this point. The hon. Gentleman can intervene later if he wishes.

Most lone parents do not want a handout; they would like a job. Since I was elected to the House, I have had a number of conversations with lone parents in my constituency, many of whom are desperate to get back into work, but feel that the system conspires against them. Many lone parents in my constituency are well qualified. I remember one in particular who had a degree in molecular biology and some years' experience of working in a professional environment. Her problem was not finding work—plenty of organisations wanted to employ her—but the fact that she could not find work that paid her enough to pay her child minder and be better off than she was on benefit. Yet the state was paying out four times more to her in benefits than it would have paid to subsidise her child minding expenses, to enable her to work.

That is a crazy way to organise the benefits system. It does not benefit women and their children, and it certainly benefits neither the state nor the taxpayer. At the same time as we are paying lone mothers to stay on benefit, my constituency is experiencing job skills shortages. Many lone parents are highly skilled. Not to use those skills is a disgrace, given that we are experiencing job skills shortages.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) has been doing sterling work in that respect. She has emphasised the disproportionate number of parents who depend on benefit in the United Kingdom. When we look at other countries, we realise that in Denmark, 38 per cent. of single mothers depend on benefit; in France, the figure is 37 per cent.; in Belgium, it is 38 per cent.; in Norway, it is 43 per cent.; and in Sweden it is 33 per cent. In the United Kingdom, however, the figure is a staggering 70 per cent. No wonder our benefits bill is so enormous. Benefit is paid out not just to people who want it, but to people who would prefer to have a job.

The Daycare Trust has just published an interesting leaflet in A4 format, which is convenient for Members of Parliament who do not have a vast amount of reading time. It has found that there are 800,000 latchkey children—children who go home after school to an empty house because their parents work and no affordable child care is available. Only two children in 100 have out-of-school child care places. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham has emphasised the importance of out-of-school child care places and the crucial part that they play in helping lone parents and other parents to get back into useful employment.

When I was first elected nearly five years ago, I was so concerned about the problem that I called together several organisations in my constituency, some in the public sector, some in the voluntary sector and some in the private sector, to see whether there was anything that we could do as a local initiative.

We quickly decided that the lack of cheap nursery places was not the only problem, and that there were other factors that we might be able to deal with more easily. One critical factor for lone parents who wish to return to work is the lack of co-ordinated information. They need information on child care. That is available from social services or, in Cambridgeshire, from the under-eights advisers. They need information on jobs, and possibly on training. Again, that is available from different organisations. Parents also need to find out whether they would be better off in work than on benefit. That involves a visit to yet another organisation, the Benefits Agency.

Let us try to imagine what that is like for a lone parent with two children, who probably does not have her own transport and has to drag the children across a city such as Cambridge to the jobcentre, the Benefits Agency, social services, the further education college and wherever else she needs to go. It is obvious that the logistics and mechanics of that can become impossible.

[Mrs. Campbell]

We decided to provide a co-ordinated information service, and that service, which is called Childcare Links, was launched on Monday by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham. It is doing precisely the job that the Benefits Agency should have started doing years ago.

Childcare Links provides an Internet service, freely available on all Internet access points across the county. There are now 11 of those in libraries, offices and schools, and of course the service is available on home computers, too. It provides a series of interactive web pages that guide users through the different areas that must be co-ordinated by someone looking for a job.

Those pages include information on what qualifications are needed, what training may be applied for, and how to find suitable child care to fit in with any training or job that may be chosen. We have collected all the information on registered child care in Cambridgeshire, and parents will be able to search for nurseries, child minders, out-of-school clubs and much more.

In addition, the service provides signposts to other helpful agencies, such as the under-eights advisers, the benefits advice centre, the citizens advice bureau and careers guidance. We have also made available details of play, sports and leisure activities for children, so that parents can make full use of the wide range of activities on offer in Cambridgeshire.

In setting up the system, we had help from many organisations, including Cambridgeshire county council, Cambridge city council, and Greater Peterborough training and enterprise council, as well as Cambridgeshire TEC. A huge number of voluntary sector organisations also contributed. We had advice and help from the citizens advice bureau in Cambridge, Cambridge jobsearch, Cambridgeshire careers guidance, Cambridge women's resources centre, Cambridge university and many others. We also had huge support from several private organisations, most notably Andersen Consulting, which provided a superb piece of software. It is stunning, and user-friendly for people who may not be accustomed to accessing such technology.

I am pleased to report that, although the service was launched only on Monday, there are already 500 hits a day—that is, at least 500 accesses to the service every day. We have had some success already. Last week we managed to help a working mother whose children are at school in Saffron Walden, where half-term was last week. She wanted to find some child care in Cambridge, where she was working, and assumed that that would be difficult, because most of the half-term child care there would be arranged for this week, which is half-term in Cambridgeshire. I am pleased to say that she received help from the system, and quickly located a child care organisation that could help her.

Another example concerns an employee relocating from Sweden. If the service had not been available, he would almost certainly have had to wait until he arrived, to find the child care that he wanted, but by using the Internet service, he made arrangements from Sweden before he arrived, and his children are now happily settled in nursery schools in the Cambridge area.

The service is aimed primarily at lone parents. I was therefore somewhat surprised when I heard that the Benefits Agency's Parent Plus scheme would be piloted in Cambridge. I have been told that under that scheme, an organiser has just been appointed to search for information on child care in Cambridgeshire and make it available. Given that our service is already up and working, and has made information about all registered child care available on the Internet, and through citizens advice bureaux, council offices and libraries throughout the county, I find that extraordinary.

What we are doing has been described as a first-stop shop or as "simple government". I should like to think of it as a re-engineering exercise. Instead of thinking about the ways in which public and private sector organisations supply information to members of the public, we are turning the system on its head. We are thinking about the needs of a specific group of customers, and are using modern technology to supply what they need in the most simple and user-friendly manner.

That not only makes information more accessible and easier to use, but gives people more power over their own lives. It enables, it motivates and it means that things that previously seemed impossible are suddenly within one's grasp. I hope that the service will take off, and that we shall be able to expand it nationwide. We need a Government with the energy and vision to help that happen—qualities sadly lacking in the present Government. Let us hope that we shall soon have a Labour Government, who will do all they can to promote it.

I shall briefly pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, about pensioners who, although entitled to income support, do not receive it. About 1 million pensioners fall into that category. In many cases, the sums that people do not claim are quite large, and the average sum unclaimed is £14 a week.

Some such pensioners already claim council tax benefit, and the form used to claim it is almost identical to that used for claiming income support. Birmingham city council has an innovative scheme that makes good use of the information on that form. The computer system that assesses people for council tax benefit also assesses them for income support.

When pensioners make a claim for council tax benefit in Birmingham, the computer assesses the claims and sends them supplementary information on a piece of paper, telling them not only whether they are eligible for income support but, if appropriate, the weekly sum to which they would be entitled if they claimed it. The form then suggests that pensioners tick a box indicating whether they would like to claim. If the box is ticked, the information is sent on to the Benefits Agency, and the claim is made as simply as that.

Of course, that system would not benefit people who, although entitled to council tax benefit and income support, do not claim either. But if it were introduced throughout the country, it would enable us to catch many pensioners who do not claim the income support to which they are entitled.

The Government talk about take-up schemes, but they did not take up our suggestion that the data matching outlined in the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill could be used in a positive and beneficial way, to enable the new computer systems to identify pensioners who could claim income support but do not, and calculate their entitlement. With a minor tweaking of the system,

we could provide such computer systems and eliminate at a stroke the pensioner poverty that the hon. Member for Rochdale described so well. The Government are not addressing the crucial matter of the rising number of pensioners who do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled. We should do all we can to eliminate pensioner poverty.

8.19 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): The Labour party has come a long way in this Parliament: I recall that, several years ago, we would listen to the sharp wit of the right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) or the dulcet tones of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), and we would have one or more votes on the orders; now, the Labour party asks the usual channels for a full day's debate and can barely come up with one or two speakers. It is pathetic.

I do not do this often, but if I might presume to give my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) some advice as he sits quietly and attentively on the Front Bench, perhaps next year, when we are returned to office, when the usual channels on the Opposition side ask for a full day's debate, they might be asked a little more searchingly whether they will be able to come up with any speakers.

Almost in her opening sentence, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) told us that we would not be having a vote tonight. In 1994, the Labour party told its Back Benchers not to vote, but about 50 or 60 of them did so. I believe that the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) was among them. The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) did not bother to stay on that occasion.

It is enormously sad when, in a debate such as this, on issues that are enormously important to the less well-off and the less fortunate in our society, so few Opposition Members seek to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, or stay throughout the debate.

I represent a seaside constituency that is possibly in the top 10 in the country for the proportion of elderly people, and senior citizens regularly come to me with problems such as those described by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne). I do not agree with everything she said, but I want to home in on her point about the importance of citizens advice bureaux. I pay tribute to Margaret Wilson, the manager of the bureau in Southport, and her colleagues, who do such a splendid job, as a result of which fewer people need to see me at my advice session than would otherwise be the case.

The hon. Members for Peckham and for Rochdale both said that we might not have a Division later, although some of us are far too cautious to rush away, but if the matters are not contentious, as the hon. Member for Rochdale suggested, why did she vote against one of the orders last year? This is not the first such debate that I have spoken in. Looking back in the *Official Report* over several years, I have noticed that, during a Division in 1994, I raised a point of order expressing disbelief that Opposition Members could vote against the annual uprating of social security benefits.

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) got a little hot under the collar in suggesting that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) had some interest to declare. Of course my hon. Friend had, as always, acted perfectly properly. If I have an interest to declare, it is that I am in receipt of a social security benefit, and perhaps in a moment I might draw on my personal experiences to underline the point made by the hon. Members for Rochdale and for Peckham about the plight of war pensioners.

War pensioners are often somewhat abused in the political arena, and we see far too many crocodile tears. If we were to target resources away from another group to pay war pensioners more, it would not necessarily mean that we were targeting them on those in greatest need. War pensioners are not necessarily 65 or older; many are considerably younger than me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), who has had such an influence on Conservative thinking over the years, touched on the importance of younger people making private provision well in advance for their retirement. My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) said that, at the moment, three to four people were paying taxes to cover the pensions of those in retirement, that early in the 21st century it would go down to about two to one, and that in the not-too-distant future far more people would be in retirement than in work paying taxes to look after them.

All too often, we hear constituents saying that they have paid their dues. It is difficult to explain to them that their national insurance contributions do not come anywhere near paying for the pensions they receive. It is therefore important for our younger constituents to think carefully about saving and contributing to private pension schemes.

I endorse the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant about over-regulation in the City. We need a sensible and appropriate form of regulation in the pensions industry, but it should not be over-restrictive. In a previous career with Barclays bank, I came across people who had money—not necessarily a great deal—sitting around in accounts, that could have been better used, but they were frightened of the regulations, or found it difficult to make choices because of the complexity of the pensions industry.

We heard earlier about the enthusiasm with which the Labour party would like to impose a windfall tax, if it ever got the chance. Such a tax would affect not the so-called fat cats but many of our constituents on the most modest means, who would have to pay higher gas, electricity or water bills. It would affect those on the benefits that the orders will uprate.

The more we hear about a windfall tax, the less the public are fooled. The public are not fools; they know that somebody will have to pay, and that those with money—at the upper echelons, as was said earlier—will manage to avoid it. People much further down the scale—those we are trying to get out of the poverty trap—would be most affected.

It is important to target resources to help those in greatest need to get back to work. All too often, constituents say, "If only we could have a little bit more help. It really isn't worth my while taking a full-time job, because I'm going to lose this benefit or that money."

I pay tribute to the Government's efforts to boost family credit whenever possible, which has been such a valuable asset in helping people back to work. I believe that the most is given where the need is greatest. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to tell us later how much support we are giving to how many people through family credit.

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

It would be devastating if we had not just a windfall tax, but the ravages of the social chapter and the minimum wage, with all its difficulties of pay differentials. Some Opposition Members may want a minimum wage for all the best reasons, but I sometimes think from listening to them that it is merely the politics of envy. However, I will leave that to one side.

Under a minimum wage, those who received increases in their pay might not be those in work on the lowest pay rates. It is rather like arguing for council house sales receipts to be spent, but finding that those receipts are in places such as Malvern Hills district council—where there is not the greatest need to spend money on housing.

I represent a seaside resort, and I shall mention two issues to illustrate how the matters to which I have alluded would affect my constituency. As in other seaside resorts, we have slightly higher than average unemployment, and seasonal unemployment. Many people who are not originally from Southport drift in from the hinterland, and sometimes from hundreds of miles away—some people have come to my surgery from as far away as Kent. Recently, the single regeneration budget has provided an investment of £8.9 million—which has brought in a further £31 million from the private sector—to revamp the town centre, develop a sea wall, provide new housing and enable other regeneration plans to come to fruition.

On a subject close to my heart—it is one of which the Minister will be aware—the money will help us to undertake our review of local government so that we can become a county borough again. All this is intended to boost the local economy and local jobs. What would happen if we had a minimum wage and a windfall tax? They would decimate all the good work that we have achieved in this Parliament. We are trying to rebuild the tourist infrastructure in the town, but I am immensely worried that, under a Labour Government, there would be nothing for my constituents except greater unemployment.

In one of the seven wards in my constituency—those who know Southport know that that it is only seven miles long by one mile wide—there are 70 nursing homes. What would happen to low-paid workers if Labour came to power and implemented a minimum wage? It would decimate the number of jobs available. It is bad enough being ruled by the Labour party—aided and abetted by the Liberal Democrats—from Bootle, but it would be devastating if we had a Labour Government to go with it.

The hon. Member for Peckham said that people are having to sell their homes to provide care for themselves. In my local authority area, the Government have given extra money from emergency contingency reserves not just once, but twice to deal with what might be described as a unique problem of care for the elderly and bed blocking. But none of the money provided by the Government for those who have savings of £16,000 and under has been spent on the very people that the Government sought to help.

That underlines the fact that my authority—effectively run by the Labour party—has one of the worst records in the country in looking after the elderly. The hon. Lady was quite wrong to suggest that, as a result of Government policy, people have had to sell their homes.

It is important to continue to combat fraud. My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge referred to roads protesters, and I too believe that it is utterly disgraceful that people who are frankly not available for work may well be claiming benefit. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other Ministers will continue to take initiatives to crack down on bogus claimants. In my constituency—which is predominantly elderly and middle-class—most people have little in the way of savings, but have worked hard all their lives and scrimped and saved for their retirement. Every pound we save by combating fraud is a pound that we must spend on those in the greatest need.

I return to the subject of war pensions. War pensioners seem to be almost flavour of the month with some Opposition politicians. During the recent by-election in Yorkshire, the Liberal Democrats ran a campaign targeted almost solely on war pensioners, and the hon. Member for Peckham said today that the Government were not doing enough for war pensioners. I am living proof of the fact that war pensioners are not all terribly old buffers—although some may be—or senior citizens of pensionable age.

War pensions are benefits given to people who have an injury of one kind or another. Opposition Members who seek to boost the benefit in real terms—by a figure that they have not yet told us—should realise that that will not necessarily put more money into the pockets of those who need it the most. In an earlier intervention, I suggested—in a tongue-in-cheek fashion—that, if I had a pound for every war pension I had gained for my constituents during this Parliament, I would be a fairly wealthy young man. One of my hon. Friends said that I am not a young man, but I am in comparison with him.

Boosting war pensions by giving people more money depending on their percentage of disability does not necessarily target people as well as I would like. I pay tribute to the Government on this matter. It is not a case of demand exceeding supply, as the Government have provided extra resources for tribunals to look after the enormous number of people who—as a result of the publicity given to war pensions by the Department of Social Security—have made an application.

I will not comment in detail on the issue of people with hearing impediments, although my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People may think it appropriate to do so in winding up. However, it has been a great success for the Government's social security policy.

I have one constructive criticism on war pensions, and I believe that it has been addressed during this Parliament. On the day of the general election in 1983, I was evacuated to a military hospital. I watched the election results on television, and it was that night that I said to myself that, if I could not stay where I was, politics was what I would try to do. Some years later, Madam Deputy Speaker, you are stuck with me.

It took a long time for me to claim, be assessed and have the advantage of a 20 per cent. disability pension, and I received between £90 and £100 per month tax-free. If one compares my take-home pay with that of one of my constituents who may have next to nothing, one sees the difference.

I deprecate those hon. Members, whichever party they are from, who use war pensions to try to gain votes. Ex-service organisations and the Royal British Legion would not want politicians to continue do so. However, I pay that genuine tribute to the Government, because

they have done a great deal to ensure that many people whose disability was not perhaps recognised early enough in their lives now have a war pension as a result of their injuries.

In the 1970s, under the last Labour Government, there was 27 per cent. inflation, the Government did not pay the Christmas bonus to senior citizens, and there was no new hospital for Southport because they had to cut the hospital building programme by a third—we had to wait for the election of a Conservative Government before we got our brand new district general hospital in Southport. Looking at the record, I have no doubt that the interests of my constituents will best be served by the re-election of this Conservative Government.

8.40 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I am grateful to have caught your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I confess that I had not intended to detain the House for long. I have a few, I hope, pithy things to say, but I feel that I have a responsibility to expand on the comments that I intended to make, because there has been such a paucity of speeches from Opposition Members. I do not unduly criticise them for failing to produce a lot of crocodile-tears speeches on the social security system, but I wonder what it means. I am interested in the speculation of my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on their silence.

Could this be the reason? The age of reality seems to have dawned on certain Opposition Front Benchers, notably the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—he is the ghost at this feast, because he instructed the Opposition social security team to stick to the spending plans set by this Government, but it is my guess that not many people, particularly in the Labour party, want to support the proposals of the ghost at the feast. For years, the Labour party has established itself on the principle that increased Government expenditure is the way to solve the ills of the nation. That has been the bedrock philosophy of the Labour party. Having that foundation stolen from under their feet has left many Opposition Members drifting in the ether. I regret that we could not hear from more Opposition Members with their drifting speeches this evening.

I take great pleasure in taking part in this debate and following my hon. Friend the Member for Southport. This budget is probably the most important issue that we ever discuss in the House, not simply because it is by far the biggest, but because we do not have a political system that enfranchises the poor—there are various definitions of the poor, including the bottom 20 per cent. and those on income support—as a pressure group. When we change benefits for poorer people, there are no riots in the streets, the trade unions do not rush to the barricades and there are no particular groups in the House that can sway large numbers on those issues. The poor of this country are the responsibility of every hon. Member, because each and every one of us represents a constituency in which the recipients of this budget live, so it is up to each and every one of us to represent the interests of our constituents as best we can in respect of this budget.

I never lose the opportunity to remind whatever audience I happen to be addressing, whether the House or elsewhere, of the background that we have to live with—the three numbers that stick in my mind when considering the growth of social security. When the Conservative Government of 1974 left office, social security expenditure represented 7.4 per cent. of gross domestic product; when we regained office in 1979, it had risen to 9 per cent.; and by the time the Social Security Select Committee dealt with the growth in social security expenditure in 1994, it had reached nearly 12.5 per cent. of GDP.

The great achievement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State during his tenure of office has been to begin to reverse that trend of inexorable growth. Even during Mrs. Thatcher's Administration, the trend rate of economic growth may have been about 2.2 per cent., but the trend rate of growth in social security expenditure was 3.3 per cent. We are stuck with that history.

It was my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in his famous Mais lecture, who burst open the problem of that structural growth in social security expenditure and forced it on to the political agenda, forcing hon. Members of all parties to discuss the issue and face the consequences of not doing anything about it. Only my right hon. Friend has been able to do something about it, and that is what we need to discuss today. His great achievement has been to reduce the rate of growth in social security expenditure to something that we can conceivably afford into the future—a rate that is below the trend rate of economic growth—so that we can look forward to that expenditure becoming a reducing proportion of GDP, and so that we can, as many Opposition Members have suggested, transfer expenditure to other priority programmes and to the general competitiveness of our economy.

One of the ironies of this debate is that new Labour grudgingly admires that achievement. The Labour party, or certainly the Front-Bench team, has switched its attack. The old attack was based on the gut reaction that we should spend more and that every problem should be dealt with by more money.

Mr. McLeish: You are spending more.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman has switched his attack. He says that we are spending too much. As I explained, that may be why so few of his colleagues are here to support him, because they do not agree with that policy. His attack is that we spend too much and that the growth in social expenditure that he aided and abetted during the Thatcher years has become an evil to be attacked. The Opposition have switched their attack the other way—we have not cut expenditure enough.

Even then, there is a fundamental inconsistency. Opposition Front Benchers are playing two tunes: one tune to try to reassure the electors that the next Labour Government—whenever they will be elected—will not need extra taxpayers' resources, and the other for their trade union supporters, their Back Benchers and the constituency Labour parties, telling them that more money will be available.

The policies that Labour espouses—for example, the minimum wage—will indirectly and directly increase social security expenditure by adding unemployed people to the dole queues. Welfare to work has been properly costed at more than £800 million and may return some people to work, but the net cost would be more than £440 million.

[Mr. Jenkin]

It is a failure of understanding on the part of the Labour party if it thinks that there are easy stones to turn over to find self-financing schemes to get people back to work more readily and to reduce the social security burden. That is the Midas touch that Labour promises to bring to the social security budget. If it were easy, would not every western Government with a large welfare budget leap at its proposals? Experience shows that, where such experiments have been tried, they prove to be more difficult to achieve—and more rigorous, perhaps even more authoritarian—than Labour would have us believe.

Another Labour policy is abolition of the 16-hour rule. How nice it would be to allow people to work more than 16 hours a week and not confiscate their benefits, but that promise would cost another £875 million. Labour has failed to live up to that promise. The introduction of local discretion in social security policy is a desirable aim, but if introduced in isolation—as if it could ever be a revenue-neutral policy—the most conservative estimate is that it would cost another £410 million.

Most staggering of all is the proposal for a guaranteed minimum pension. All evening, Opposition speakers have railed against the evils of means testing, yet they want to introduce the most massive increase in means-tested benefits for pensioners that can be imagined, amounting to an annual expenditure increase of £2.2 billion. That is against the background of their opposition to every revenue-saving measure proposed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State during this Parliament. The idea that the Opposition—I am tempted to use that uncouth phrase, "that lot over there"—could be responsible guardians of the public purse when they offer a concoction of inconsistency, economic moonshine and downright dishonesty, is extraordinary.

Perhaps the greatest irony is the saga of the windfall profits tax. Let us explore its background. It is true that, early in the life of this succession of successful Conservative Governments, my right hon. Friend Lord Howe, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduced a windfall profits tax on the banks. The background to that was a quantum change in the method of calculating interest, so that, overnight, the banks had a windfall gain in their profits. It was not actual cash coming into the banks but a change in bank regulation which suddenly and dramatically improved their balance sheets. Because it was a regulatory change, a windfall profits tax was justified. There is nothing of that nature with the proposed windfall profits tax on the privatised utilities, which lies in the background of this debate. At least a bank is a bank; there is argument about what constitutes a privatised utility.

Labour's friends in the former privatised companies are trying to wriggle out from the obligations that are to be put upon them. *[Interruption.]* It would be invidious to mention names in this place. There is also the question of what constitutes a windfall profit.

All our 33 privatisations have been opposed by Opposition Members, who said that they would not work. The right hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) told us that British Airways would be the pantomime horse of capitalism, but that turned out to be one of our most spectacularly successful privatisations. Their opposition continued right up to our latest privatisation, that of British Rail. We privatised Railtrack, created and sold the leasing companies, and introduced rolling stock companies and the passenger rail franchise companies. We are attacked by the Opposition not because it has not worked, as they forecast, but because it is too successful.

So successful and cash-generative have our privatisations been, and such are the quantum leaps in services to the customer that have been achieved, that the Opposition think that those companies are too profitable and they want to take the money away. It is ironic that the policies that they wish to fund if, God forbid, they are ever returned to government, and that they would have us believe would be the fruits of their efforts, are actually the fruits of our policies. That underlines how unsustainable is their philosophy of public spending and Government.

When the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) made a speech capping the spending ambitions of his fellow Front Benchers, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described it as the jackdaw speech. What a brilliant image that is. New Labour is stealing Conservative policies, but it is stealing them in the manner of a dumb animal picking up bright things because they seem attractive, to salt them away, not knowing their value.

There was a similar lack of understanding in the exchanges between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). She is beginning to mouth the thinking of the Social Security Select Committee about the future of social security. There is a problem with the growth of means-tested benefits, and the Government are fully aware that the growth of means testing, particularly for those in or near to work, discourages work and discourages future pensioners from saving. However, the language of the debate has been created not by Labour Front Benchers but by the Social Security Select Committee and, in particular, by our much-loved and revered Chairman. He created the language; he invented the term "poverty trap" when he was director of the Child Poverty Action Group. He has enlarged the language of the corrosion of positive social virtues through the process of means testing. He is having some difficulties, as we all are, in going further than that.

It is not good enough for the hon. Member for Peckham simply to rail against the growth of means testing and then propose absolutely no solutions for dealing with it. In the background is the implication that there needs to be more general expenditure on welfare and more general benefits to do away with means-tested benefits. Any efforts that Conservatives have made—with the introduction of Parent Plus and family credit—to turn means-tested benefits into positive benefits that help people back into the labour market are immediately attacked by the Opposition as subsidies on low pay. There is no understanding of the problems or their solutions.

New Labour is new; it has changed, but it is still way behind the Conservatives. I have one or two differences with my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). After the battles that he had about, for example, uprating pensions in line with prices or wages, I can understand his amazement that the new Labour party has been converted to the uprating of state pensions by prices and to the need for funded second-tier

pensions. However, it is a little late for the Labour party to be converted, because the decisions needed to be made 10 years ago, and to keep being made.

It was the Labour party that fought the provisions of the Pensions Act 1995, which further reformed state earnings-related pension schemes to contain the future liability. The Labour party is still behind us, because, by talking about the introduction of stakeholder pensions, it harks back to the sort of state corporatism that the Social Security Select Committee saw in Singapore. I see that the hon. Member for Croydon, North–West (Mr. Wicks), who joined us on that trip, is in his place. The Labour party is harking back to the sort of state corporatism that the old colonial British Government left behind in Singapore in the 1950s.

When we asked the Labour party who set up the central provident fund system in Singapore, we were told that the Singapore Government inherited it from the colonial administration. Things have moved on since then; we do not want a paternalistic Government-controlled pensions system, whether funded or unfunded. We want a system in which individuals and families have personal control over the capital that they have invested for their future and their families.

To start suddenly talking about second-tier pensions half way through the 1990s—when half the working population has already had second-tier pensions, and been saving for them in occupational schemes for at least 100 years, in personal schemes for at least 50 years, and most particularly and more populously, for the past 10 years—after opposing opting out from SERPS for the past 10 years is extraordinary and inconsistent. I congratulate the Labour party on its progress. We should regard it as a delinquent child who is making unexpected progress, but let us not pretend that it is an adult political party capable of making adult political decisions as an adult Government. There is much more progress to be made.

The hon. Member for Peckham proffered her idea of stakeholder pensions as a second tier, but she is actually proposing a fourth tier. We already have three tiers: the first is the basic state pension, the second is the state earnings-related pension scheme, which can be commuted into a funded personal pension, and there is often a third tier in terms of voluntary savings for retirement. The Labour party now seems to be proposing a fourth tier.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) that part of the origin of the misselling problem is the extraordinarily complex and excessive regulation of the private pensions market. By that, I mean not simply the regulation of salesmen's behaviour but regulation in its broadest sense: regulation creates a broad complexity of pensions products, and the tax system creates many extraordinary anomalies to encourage people to save.

If we are looking to the future, we need to join the great debate about funded and unfunded pensions and about hidden liabilities. We need to talk about the future of the welfare system in terms of a savings-based welfare system built on personal and family capital. That means jettisoning all ideas about moving over to the European social model based on collective state provision. It means turning our backs on that failed system, because a contract between generations is bound to fail as demographics change. It means moving the opposite direction to stakeholder welfare.

I have one last thing to say tonight: watch the work of the Select Committee on Social Security. I hope that the framework of the debate in our report on savings for retirement, which should be produced before the end of this Parliament, will be the future and not the past, which is what the Labour party is offering us.

9.4 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I apologise for not having been present for the entire debate. I had to speak to a lobby in the Grand Committee Room, but I was here at the beginning and I heard the speech made by the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), which was curious to say the least. She fell into a particular trap.

As usual, wise things have been said by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security. He said that anyone who says that Labour's welfare objectives can be achieved without spending more either has something wrong with them or should not be trusted. I am not sure which of those is true of the hon. Member for Peckham, but plainly one of them must be, because she seemed to think that Labour could achieve its social objectives without increasing expenditure.

At least the hon. Lady hesitated before saying that, whereas her predecessor, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), had no compunction. When asked whether Labour could achieve its plans without spending more money by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in last year's debate, he responded:

"Yes, and if the Secretary of State will contain himself for a few weeks, he will learn how we intend to go about it."—[*Official Report*, 20 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. 211.]

That was a year ago, yet we are still waiting.

We get bits and pieces, but no properly costed programme to carry out the objectives that Labour Members like to tell us about, not only in the Chamber but outside. They make promises and talk about how wonderful the one-off payments used to be, which leads people to believe that we will go back to one-off payments if there is a Labour Government. None of the plans is costed, nothing is clearly stated—they say one thing to one group and something else to another.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was characteristically too generous to the Labour party when he spoke about its spending plans. He said that it would seek to contain expenditure across the whole range of Government spending within the current spending plans. However, over the period of the public expenditure survey round, those spending plans are predicated on about £9 billion of privatisation proceeds. The big question is, therefore, if a Labour Government are going to have to raise that money, what will they privatise?

We know—at least we think we know—that it will not be the Tote. Until the Labour party—which has opposed every single privatisation and every single agency being put out to the private sector—is able to come up with a list of things that a Labour Government would privatise, its spending plans have a huge hole in them, even at the current spending targets. Until Labour Members come clean on that, we will not know what they are talking about.

The theme of Labour Members' speeches that I have heard tonight is that the gap between rich and poor has increased more in Britain than in any other major

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

developed country, which is a quote from the previous Labour spokesman on social security, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. However, the facts simply do not bear out that assertion. We should look at what is really happening in Britain. That is not to say that there are no problems or that there are no people who are poor or who find life difficult, but there can be no doubt that the Conservative Government's actions have helped many poorer people to become richer.

The Government have a programme of major reforms and of targeting expenditure where it is needed, of helping those most in need—for instance, spending on vulnerable groups has increased by £1.5 billion a year since 1988—of improving the system of child benefit, of cracking down on fraud and of helping people into jobs. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) has said, Labour Members have said not a word about the success of family credit. They did not mention the fact that we introduced it, and improved it in 1992, 1994 and 1995. That benefit has boosted the incomes of families with children, who are in work but who have low incomes. Almost 700,000 families now receive family credit, which is worth an average of £55 per week.

A moment ago, I asked what is really happening in Britain. I wonder whether Opposition Members would recognise the Britain that is described in the following terms. The average incomes of the poorest tenth of the population in 1991 had risen by nearly 50 per cent. in real terms by 1994. Do Opposition Members recognise that description of Britain under a Conservative Government? Do they recognise the fact that the poorest 10 per cent. of the population by income spend 14 per cent. more now than they did in 1979? Do Opposition Members deny that that is the situation in Britain today? Do they deny that less well-off people now have a higher standard of living than when Labour was in power? *[Interruption.]* I shall give way to the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) if he thinks that he knows his facts.

Of the 20 per cent. of the population with the lowest incomes, 85 per cent. now have a fridge-freezer compared with only 32 per cent. in 1979. Opposition Members may think that that is irrelevant, but it shows what changes have occurred. Some 75 per cent. of that group have central heating, compared with 40 per cent. in 1979. If the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge thinks that I am making up those figures, he should intervene and say so. They are the facts: this is what is happening in Britain today under a Conservative Government.

Most people are on low incomes for only a short period because our society is highly mobile. Opposition Members shake their heads, but they will not get to their feet and deny that that is happening in Britain today.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Tell the people outside; they do not believe it.

Mr. Hughes: That comment is characteristic of the hon. Gentleman. These are the facts. If he is confident that I am wrong, I challenge him to dispute my facts. We have a highly mobile society, which is also a meritocracy. Almost half of those on the lower tenth of incomes in 1991 had moved up to a higher income band by the following year. Do Opposition Members deny that fact?

Mr. Denham: They did not.

Mr. Hughes: The Institute for Fiscal Studies believes that it is true.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I do not think that the debate should proceed via answers to questions from sedentary positions.

Mr. Hughes: Although they will not come to the Dispatch Box and say so, Opposition Members deny that what I say is true. I have just quoted from the Institute for Fiscal Studies report of 1995, entitled "Poverty Dynamics in Great Britain". I think that people in this country would rather trust the IFS than Labour Front Benchers.

Less than 1 per cent. of men aged between 25 and 44 in 1978 stayed on unemployment, sickness or incapacity benefits between 1979 and 1993. About three quarters of men who leave their jobs find another job within a year. Listening to Labour Members, one would think, first, that long-term unemployment is a new phenomenon; and, secondly, that the same group of people remain unemployed year after year.

Finally, according to the 1996 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development study, "Employment Outlook", Britain enjoys more upward mobility among young workers than any from a sample of major western economies. Between 1986 and 1991, 62 per cent. of British under-25s moved up at least one band, as opposed to only 39 per cent. of young Swedes, whose social system new Labour would have us emulate.

That is what is going on in Britain. Our system has been improved and made affordable as a result of the heroic efforts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We have a system on which people can rely. All the Labour party can do is raise fears about its affordability, and raise people's hopes that somehow Labour would give them higher benefits. We know, as does Labour, that that is not true. Such deception by the Labour party will stop it ever having the opportunity to put its policies into practice.

9.15 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I am not sure that the debate reached the dizzy heights of being interesting, but it has been an important debate nevertheless. The highlight came when the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) got rather excited and suggested that the jackdaw was an animal, but at that point there were pigs flying round the Chamber as well, so what is new in the Government's approach?

Never have I seen Conservative Members so concerned to speak about the Opposition's policies. The proximity of a general election that Labour will win may loom large in their plans. I hope so. They spent a great deal of time attacking us this evening, but they refused to defend their appalling record on social security, especially in recent years under the guardianship of the right hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley).

It is important to consider the charges that we preferred against the Government. Social security is a cradle-to-grave issue that affects virtually every individual in the nation at some point in his or her life.

It is useful to reflect on some of the comments made during the debate. I have never before heard my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) referred to as a toff. It is a pity that he was not present to hear that criticism.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford–on–Avon (Mr. Howarth) made an interesting point about the quality of service in the Department. I take the opportunity to praise one of the offices in my constituency. The lady—I am sure that I cannot use her name—has moved from being in charge of the benefits office in Kirkcaldy. She has been superb—courteous and effective, and the office that she managed provided efficient service. If every Department of State and every local government department were as effective as her office, less criticism would be levelled at public services throughout the nation.

I want to spend some time considering the issue that the Government do not want to talk about—poverty in modern Britain. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) suggested that the statistics on poverty were nonsense. I intervened at that point to suggest that one would describe the Government's statistics not as nonsense but as a worrying and sinister aspect of Britain as we approach the new millennium.

The Government put up no defence this evening. Over the past four years, an extra £15 billion has been spent on social security. The Government spend, spend, spend, but we have more poverty, more waste and more people living on the margins of society. The Government wax eloquent about the burdens facing the taxpayer, who pays more as a contribution to the social security budget.

We should put what the Government have been doing in context, and in doing so we should look at the past four years in particular. If the money involved had been not expenditure but investment, in a product that then materialised, we might have been debating that tonight; but, in a sense, all we have seen is a black hole. We can argue about the proportion of the budget that has been devoted to so-called family benefit, as against "failure benefit", "poverty benefit" or benefit for older people. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State says, from a sedentary position, "The facts are there; we are telling the truth." We can dispute the facts, but I think that it is important to look at the issue of poverty.

It was the Prime Minister who said, in an article in *The Herald* published on 4 March 1992,

> "Some people are still not very well off, but poverty is measured by the Income Support level. This is the only way people measure poverty, the number of people above and below the Income Support level."

That was the start of the Prime Minister's embarkation on the idea of the classless society. Moreover, it was at about that time that the current Secretary of State took over at the Department of Social Security. At the Conservative party conference, on Wednesday 9 October 1996, he said:

> "But for us dependency isn't just a waste of money: it's a waste of lives. It not only drains the public purse, it saps the human spirit. That is why we are determined to continue our welfare revolution—developing a new approach to get people back to work—taking tough choices to curb welfare's relentless growth."

The Secretary of State did not go on to explain why the social security budget was at an historically high level, and still growing, when he took over.

I think it important to identify two simple aspects of poverty. First, poverty is not just about money; in Britain, it means families and individuals experiencing social exclusion, welfare dependency, economic and long-term insecurity, community dislocation, detachment from the labour market and, critically—I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree about this—the undermining of the self-worth of the individual. The catalyst in the creation of a productive and civilising society is the self-worth of every one of the 56 million people who live in the United Kingdom.

I said that poverty was not just about money; it is also not just about the poor. We are all involved. The recipients, or claimants, of benefit are obviously involved, but the taxpayer is playing an enormous role. One pound in three of public expenditure are now devoted to social security, and we have seen a remorseless increase over the past three or four years.

I have tried to underline the general importance of the issue, but I specifically want to confront the Government with the central charge that they are unaware, or else unwilling or unable to face up to their own statistics, which are contained in the quarterly reports on income support. We do not want to complicate life by talking about 50 per cent. of average household income or low pay at this stage.

Excluding those important considerations, let us dwell on income support. In February 1996, 5.8 million people were claiming income support. Let us recall what the Prime Minister said about the level of income support being something that could be used as a benchmark. That means that a population larger than that of Scotland is now claiming income support—and when we take into account dependants such as children and partners, the figure increases to nearly 10 million. Again, the Government, not I, worked out the ratio.

What does it mean in modern Britain for 10 million people—I exclude other definitions of poverty and low pay—to be on the breadline? What does that mean in a modern, civilised, prosperous society? It means all the things that I mentioned earlier, but it also confronts Governments, and it certainly confronts the Opposition. If we are to have a cohesive society in which fractures are healed, surely to goodness we must take account of nearly one in five of the population. Nearly 3 million children are being brought up in families whose income is, in fact, income support.

The central thrust of our charge this evening is that, in the past four years, there has been a spectacular explosion in costs and in the number of people claiming income support. Indeed, the Government's quarterly income support figures show that, between February 1992 and February 1996, a further 865 people claimed income support or entered poverty every working day. How can that be justified? I will give Ministers an opportunity to tell me, first, whether that figure is right—it is, and they know it—and, secondly, how they can justify the extraordinary explosion in the number of people marching to benefit offices day in and day out to receive girocheques.

We have been given the impression this evening that the number of unemployed people has gone down, but, in the four years to February 1996, every working day an extra 47 unemployed people claimed income support, an extra 140 pensioner claimants joined the poverty queue, and there were an additional 675 new claimants in terms of lone parents, the sick and the disabled. Those are chilling figures, and they come from the Department. *[Interruption.]*

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

The Secretary of State—making an intelligent contribution from a sedentary position—asks what we will do about it. It would be useful to have a consensus in this country on the extent of the problem. As my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) suggested, it can start very soon indeed. We need only the prospect of an election victory and we will get on with the task of rebuilding Britain, especially the task of removing people from the exclusive category into which the Government have put them.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman recited a very good question from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. We all share the concern about the extent of means testing in the benefit system, but what will the hon. Gentleman do about it? Let us not retreat into tiresome little jibes at each other at this time of the evening.

Mr. McLeish: The hon. Gentleman cannot distinguish a bird from an animal, so I am not inclined to take many more criticisms like that.

The Conservatives' cheap jibe leads me to another criticism that I wish to make. We heard tonight that in one in five non-pensionable households no one works. That is modern Britain under the Conservatives. Let me quote another statistic. One in three of all households in Britain are on means-tested benefits. When we add up the catalogue of misery, it is clear that we will inherit a legacy of Britain on benefit, Britain on the breadline. As I said earlier, give us a chance and when the election comes we will start to get on with the problem.

I have other considerations for the Minister who will reply, because we have heard—*[Interruption.]* The Government may not like this, but I am afraid that they are going to get some more of it.

Let us look at the labour market, which is crucial. Again we heard claims that, over the past four years, under the present premiership, things have improved. Let us look at the reality. Between February 1992 and February 1996, the number of people claiming income support increased by 403,000. At the same time, the number—doctored 30 or 33 times, but what does it really matter?—of unemployed people, as measured by the civilian work force in work, went down by 390,000. The important point is that the number of people in work went down by 96,000.

Income support shoots ahead, unemployment goes down, through a variety of manipulative means, and the number of people working also goes down. When the Minister deals with that little conundrum, I should like him to explain what type of productive society we are living in, given that unemployment has gone down, and we know why; income support has gone up, and I think we know why; but we do not know why there are fewer jobs in Britain. The Government's suggestion that this country is the enterprise capital of Europe is humbug and hypocrisy, and it is quite worrying when so many people are trying to get back to work.

There is a clear dividing line between the Labour party and the Government. The price of failure is being borne by millions of citizens. Like us, they must yearn for a change. We need to return to a society in which the individual and his self-worth are paramount, and in which we can collectively as a nation start to put employment and education at the heart of the modernisation of the welfare state. We need a work ethic and a learning ethic. The learning ethic is the sound issue for the next millennium.

When we talk about taking costs from the welfare budget and investing that money in education, our proposals are derided. This is the old-fashioned Conservative party. It is not willing to accept that, unless we invest in those crucial areas, motivated by the learning ethic, we as a nation, whether a productive economy or a civilised country, will fail in the next millennium. The Government do not appreciate the reality.

We make the fundamental point that a successful and cohesive society goes hand in hand with a prosperous and successful economy. That is elementary. We must now take stock—to use another of the Prime Minister's famous phrases—of the calamitous mess into which the Government have got the labour market. If we acknowledge the two sets of statistics that I gave on the massive increase in poverty and dependency under the Government and the massive mess that they have made of the labour market, we can start to chart a way forward and to find solutions for the future.

An amazing development has taken place that is found nowhere else in the European Union or in other parts of the developed world. We have not only one welfare state in Britain, but three. In-work welfare is the new growth area. The Conservative party extols the virtues of family credit. There is clearly nothing wrong with family credit, but Conservative Members should appreciate that housing benefit, council tax benefit and family credit prop up low pay in the workplace. When we suggest a minimum wage, the Government find that horrible. The fact that there is minimum wage protection in 14 of the 15 European Union countries and in great swathes of the American economy, does not move them one iota.

There has been a massive extension of in-work welfare. The Government will not let people leave welfare and go into work, so £3 billion a year is spent on propping up low wages in the workplace. We want to do something about the cause and the cost of that, whereas the Government ignore the consequences and are unable to do anything about it.

The second welfare state is the out-of-work welfare state that we have had since Beveridge. Out-of-work welfare has grown, and we have witnessed the calamitous way in which it has been overseen by the Secretary of State for Social Security. We have in-work welfare and out-of-work welfare, but not content with ensnaring so many people into the welfare state, the Government have created a third one: it is called workfare, and it is neither work nor welfare. They are developing workfare as an alternative to their other policies.

If there is one word that sums up what the Government are about on social security it is "waste". We sat through a Committee considering the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, and we made a number of suggestions.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Not one policy.

Mr. McLeish: Forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for ignoring the idle chat of Conservative Members.

In Committee, we suggested ways of tackling landlord fraud, but when matters come a little close to friends of the Conservative party, Conservative Members recoil. We wanted a register; we partly got that. We wanted a landlord offence; we did not get that. We wanted to help to toughen up a Government who are high on rhetoric but soft on reality. Waste is the key issue that distinguishes the Conservative party from a modern Labour party. We think that waste is a scandal. It is an abuse and it shows contempt for taxpayers.

We were very constructive in Committee, tried again on Report and perhaps might still toughen up the legislation in another place. Waste in social security was matched earlier in this Administration by waste under the poll tax. We now have the edifying spectacle of a beef tax, which is costing the nation £3.5 billion. Waste is no stranger to the Government. At the end of the day, the election will be fought on the basis that the Government are not interested in linking welfare to work, in tackling waste or in helping the 600,000 young people aged under 24 who are the victims of failed economic policies.

I issue a final challenge to the Minister. The windfall levy has been attacked in this debate. We are seeking to invest it in Britain's future, but the Government have derided that. I hope that the Minister agrees that getting people off welfare and into work and giving 600,000 young people the opportunity to get into productive work, training and education is right. I fear that the Government will not respond to such a challenge, but in government we will.

9.36 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), who was known as a wily midfielder in his day and certainly showed his wiliness at the Dispatch Box, producing an effort well worthy of him that rescued to some degree the speech of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). His speech was, however, a striking parallel with that of the hon. Lady's in that it contained no policies whatever of any decent substance. The only reference to beef was a sly one directed at the Government Benches—there was no beef in any policies that he might have proposed.

It was noticeable that, for most of his speech, the hon. Member for Fife, Central was supported solely on the Back Benches by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) and his hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who was elected by thousands of Conservative votes. We find ourselves with a select audience, which is a shame because the speeches, especially those of Conservative Members, have been extremely good. It is of some disappointment that they have not been heard by a wider audience, which might have been so had the Opposition sought to challenge any of the orders and put anything to the test of a vote. However, they chose not to do so.

I shall do my best to answer the debate rather than follow the hon. Member for Fife, Central. However, I should like to thank him in passing for his comments on his Benefits Agency manager. It was kind and gracious of him. I am sure that his comments reflect the appreciation felt by the majority of us of those who work extremely hard on our behalf. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) for expressing his appreciation of his citizens advice bureau manager.

Mr. McLeish: I hope that the comments will be passed through the ministerial team in the Department.

Mr. Burt: Yes, of course they will. I am again grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

The Opposition are supporting the measures that, from April, will increase benefit rates and therapeutic earning levels and revise national insurance rates. Opposition Members have in fact opposed all the measures that we have introduced in this Parliament to reform benefits, but the reforms have in some way contributed to allowing us the space for these upratings. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The number of comments made by my hon. Friends in appreciation of his handling of social security was noticeable, and I echo them.

My right hon. Friend reminded us that, in the 50 years since Beveridge, social security growth was 5 per cent. more than inflation. Thanks to our reforms, we have stabilised growth in social security to containable levels, even though there are pressures because the elderly are living longer and because of our support for the sick and disabled. That could be achieved only by the measures that we have taken in the past four Budgets. There now seems to be a consensus over the size of the budget, but it is disappointing that we had to get there on our own.

Consensus does not sit easily with some of the views that have been expressed tonight. There was a dispute across the Dispatch Box between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Peckham about the figures for growth in social security over the past few years. The figures are incontrovertible. I risk going over old ground, but the hon. Lady cannot make out that the majority of the increase in benefit expenditure has been caused by unemployment. The majority of the expenditure increases in the past few years have been related to the elderly and the long-term sick and disabled. Labour Members may see some form of black hole and think that there is an easy alternative way to look after our long-term sick and disabled and the elderly, but they never mention it.

The number of people in employment has increased from 24.4 million in 1979 to 25.8 million in the summer of last year. The figure is going higher still. The number of households with no one in work is a genuine issue. There has been an increase in the number of such households because of changes in the structure of society. There has been an increase in the number of single-adult households, including lone parents. Such households are less likely to include an earner than those with more adults.

The proportion of no-earner households in the United Kingdom is not radically different from that elsewhere—in Germany the figure is 15.5 per cent.; in France it is 16.5 per cent.; in Italy it is 17.2 per cent.; and in Spain it is 20.1 per cent. The growth in no-earner households is not just a United Kingdom phenomenon. The important question is what to do. Conservative Members are entitled to draw attention to the fact that the answers come from this side. All we get from the Opposition is criticism, but no decent answers to the difficult questions.

[Mr. Burt]

The hon. Member for Peckham ducked the major challenge offered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the minimum wage. He pointed out the gross inconsistency in supporting a policy that subsidises employment to get people back to work but not recognising the impact on an employer of increasing labour costs through the minimum wage. The hon. Lady cannot have it both ways. If bringing an employer's labour costs down through subsidy improves his perception of taking on a worker, putting his labour costs up through the minimum wage must also impact on his perception.

That is not even a fair balance. The numbers to be thrown out of work by Labour's minimum wage far outweigh the amount of money that would be recycled through the scheme of taxing someone else £3 billion to put others back to work in the spaces that are left because of the sackings caused by the minimum wage. The policy is barmy. My right hon. Friend offered the hon. Lady the chance to explain the inconsistency, but she did not.

The hon. Lady's speech was also instructive on another important issue. She advanced her previous argument on pensions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) made an exceptional contribution on pensions—a subject that he understands very well. He referred to the progress that has been made. I thought that important progress was made when the hon. Lady was dealing with Labour's plans for early retirement.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State smoked out some time ago the fact that if, under Labour's proposals, someone were to retire at the earliest possible age at no extra cost to the taxpayer, they would luxuriate in a pension for life £20 a week lower than the pension that they could expect if they retired at the earliest possible time under the current system, as most people do. That led to the question whether income-related benefits would be available to supplement a low pension.

The hon. Lady skated round that issue at the time, but she advanced her argument today when she said that there would be no extra cost to the system. Therefore, a person in that situation would not be eligible for income support. That is fascinating. Would people who are approaching retirement have to sign a pledge with the hon. Lady to say that they were willing to accept £20 less a week and that, if they fell on hard times, they would not seek access to the social security system in the future? Would that be a condition of taking early retirement? Is that what the hon. Lady means? Would people have to get permission from her to claim an early pension and then avoid falling on hard times, because she would not allow them access to income support? That was the clear implication of her remarks today.

In the future, pensioners run the risk of a pension that is £20 a week lower, and they would know that, if they fell on hard times under Labour, they would have no access to support from the social security system. I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is not in his place, because he would be spinning like a top if he understood the full implications of the hon. Member for Peckham's remarks this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Peckham also mentioned lone parents.

Ms Harman: Lone mothers.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Lady mentioned lone parents, nine out of 10 of whom are lone mothers. I am anxious to put on record what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security said at our party conference in 1993. He mentioned areas of rising spending and said:

"The third main area of rising spending is on lone parents. But I am less concerned about the cost than the breakdown of families. There are now 1.3 million lone parents. Many find themselves lone parents against their will. Widows, divorced and separated people struggle alone, but often successfully, to bring their children up well. They deserve not blame but support."

We all echo those remarks, and they are not remembered often enough when my right hon. Friend's remarks about single parents are quoted.

Our work on lone parents is not a new area for us. I was interested in the comments made by the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) about her local scheme, and I would be grateful if she would keep us informed. We have worked on the problem of lone parents for some time, and we appreciate the differences with other countries which have more lone parents in work. Lone parents in other countries do not have the option of not needing to find work until their children are 16—they have to find work much earlier.

We have tried a number of schemes to put lone parents back to work, and the most successful is the family credit scheme. The hon. Member for Peckham did not mention that. She said that lone parents were left on benefit with no assistance to get back to work, but the family credit scheme has been outstandingly successful in getting lone parents back to work. It is one of the main reasons why some 300,000 lone parents now claim family credit at a cost of £1 billion. Since 1992, some 200,000 lone parents have left income support for family credit, and more will do so in the future.

We have worked on schemes with the National Council for One Parent Families for the past three years—the contract has been renewed—to research the work and training that will be most suitable for women who want to get back to work. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has studied that area and, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, has introduced Parent Plus, which will provide structured assistance in jobseeking and training for lone parents by way of a three-year pilot project.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The best scheme in the world.

Mr. Burt: As my hon. Friend says, it will be the best scheme in the world, because it is distilled from ideas from elsewhere and ideas that we have worked on for a long time.

Not only do we share a common desire to get lone parents back into work but, as has so often been the case in social security, it is we who have had the ideas, we who are putting them into practice and we who can create budgets that can deliver, unlike the Labour party, which simply makes pious promises.

The hon. Member for Islington, North made, as always, a significant speech. If the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is one of the ghosts

at this feast because of his contribution to social security, the hon. Member for Islington, North, along with the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), are also the ghosts, because they have spoken in the past of their belief in socialism; I have no doubt that their connection with the Opposition Front Bench is tenuous, to say the least.

The hon. Member for Islington, North went through the entire range of his concerns about poverty and other such matters but his sole solution was to tax the rich. As the hon. Gentleman knows, because I have debated with him for many years, there is not much between us in our determination to deal with matters such as poverty caused through lack of employment. As sponsor Minister for Manchester and Salford with responsibility for the city challenge projects in the north of England, I have seen the Government invest serious sums of money in a variety of areas where work has been hard to come by, in order to stimulate employment and improve social conditions in hard-hit communities.

That regeneration work has been among the most successful that the Government have accomplished, and the Prime Minister and others deserve great credit for putting money into those schemes and doing the job properly. However, having recognised that money alone is not enough, they have looked for good schemes and ways to help reduce the incidence of poverty.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Southport clearly said, the hon. Member for Islington, North and, to some extent, Opposition Front-Bench Members, have failed to see that poverty in the UK is not static. There is a great deal of mobility because people get jobs, have chances to improve their position and move up the income bracket with assistance and, above all, with the availability of jobs. Again, we return to the crucial contradiction in Labour policy. I do not understand how a group of people who have shared virtually every principle that they ever stood for but who cling desperately to at least one—the determination to get people into work—can have a minimum wage policy that is so contrary to that objective.

The Conservative party's determination to get people back into work is evidenced not just by the figures that show the reality of falling unemployment and rising employment but in our determination to resist the very policies that sound marvellous on the doorstep but would do such damage to working people. We are right to resist them vigorously.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth) had the right approach when he talked about people's attitude to employment and opportunities. He quoted the phrase that we need a hand-up society rather than a handout society. That is nothing new. He need not defer to the Labour party in terms of that phrase; we have all had it in mind as part of our policy for a long time. The only difference between us and the Labour party is that we achieve it. Our welfare-to-work, family credit and work incentive policies have done the job.

The hon. Member for Rochdale, surrounded by so many of her colleagues during the debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where were they?"]—put up a lone but brave battle on a number of different issues. I must correct her analysis on war pensions. The responses from those we have consulted on the proposal to simplify war pensions have been broadly welcoming.

The measures were greeted by the Royal British Legion with the words:

"the decision on the changes has been most welcome and reassuring".

The British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association said:

"we are extremely happy with the decisions reached by the Government".

The approach that we are now taking to war pensions in connection with noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss is sound. All those who have commented agree that the medical advice that we are now following is right. The Royal British Legion's medical advisers confirmed in their open letter that

"noise induced hearing loss and loss due to ageing are broadly additive".

We accept—

Mr. Denham *rose—*

Mr. Burt: May I finish the point?

We accept that the evidence on which our new advice is based has been available to the experts for some time. That means that the current advice should have been applied earlier. However, we shall honour existing awards, despite their lack of foundation, and no existing war pensioner will lose money as a result of the change of approach.

Ms Lynne *rose—*

Mr. Denham *rose—*

Mr. Burt: I shall give way to the hon. Lady first, as I mentioned her first.

Ms Lynne: How come that Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, in the other place, seemed to back-track on the idea of new medical evidence? He seemed to admit that no new medical evidence had been brought forward, yet people who had experienced hearing loss—not to the extent of an 80-year-old at present, but hearing loss that could deteriorate over the years—would not get their war pensions. Why did Lord Mackay say that?

Mr. Burt: The clarification offered by my right hon. and noble Friend in another place related to the medical evidence. We had originally been under the impression that the medical evidence that we were receiving was new. In fact, it had been available for some time, and we might have acted upon it sooner. My right hon. and noble Friend was clarifying the fact that we did not intend to go back on awards already made, and confirming the fact that the advice on which we are now working had been available for some time.

Mr. Denham: Will the Minister confirm that, according to the experts, there has been no change in the medical evidence not only for "some time", but for 30 years? Is not the truth that it was a convenient discovery of an alleged change that led to the change in policy designed to hit future war pension claims?

Mr. Burt: I think that the number of years is immaterial. The point is that the policy that we are following now is correct, and based on medical evidence. We have clarified the small detail that had been left open through recent arguments.

[Mr. Burt]

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), in a good contribution, described in some detail the importance of work incentives. Again, we could supplement his comments in so many ways by examining our work incentive strategy since 1988. We have introduced a series of measures to ensure that people move from welfare into work—from the introduction of family credit to housing benefit earnings disregards, from national insurance contribution bonuses and contribution holidays for employers, to housing benefit run-ons. Those measures have been responsible for ensuring that people have moved from welfare into work. In the face of such evidence, it is extraordinary that Opposition Members seem so determined to go back on policies that have proved so successful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) made several points. In particular, we share with him a concern that those who claim benefits should be available for work. I assure him that the benefit claims of people who take part in protests are processed, in the same way as everyone else's, to ensure that they are indeed available for work.

I am grateful for the assistance of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) in passing on further information about a loophole. We do much to ensure that loopholes are closed, but we are always grateful for new information about them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), in what was almost the final contribution of the debate, hit the nail on the head when he described the difference between the Government and the Opposition in terms of the two tunes that Labour like to sing. There is one tune down here, which is spread round by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, and it is about Labour sticking to our spending and tax policies. There is a different tune for the poor and disadvantaged, which says that in some way the Labour party still represents some hope for them.

The truth is that the hope for those who want to see an improvement in people's conditions in this country no longer resides with the Labour party; the hope for people to improve their circumstances lies with those who are getting people back to work: the Conservative party and the Secretary of State with his policies on social security.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield said earlier that we had won the arguments both on pensions and on social security. He was so right. This is no longer a debate. We go through as an icebreaker, and Para Handy follows behind like a little tugboat trying to make something of it.

We can answer the challenges. Some years ago, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) was sent away to think the unthinkable on social security. The truth is that, as on so many other matters, the Tories have got it right.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 10th February, be approved.

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity for Work) (General) Amendment Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 31st January, be approved.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

MERCHANT SHIPPING AND MARITIME SECURITY BILL

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Merchant Shipping and Maritime Security Bill, Standing Committee A shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

DATA PROTECTION

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Mr. Michael Jack relating to the salary of the Data Protection Registrar.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

LIAISON COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Sir Fergus Montgomery be discharged from the Liaison Committee and Mr. Bob Dunn be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

NHS Prescriptions (Nutritional Supplements)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

10 pm

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): In January this year, the British Society for Allergy, Environmental and Nutritional Medicine wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health saying:

"Your ministry is planning steps which may lead to the deaths of thousands of people in the UK, and to substantial avoidable suffering for many others."

That was a reference to the threat to more than 200 nutritional or vitamin supplements currently available on the national health service prescription list, which, it is alleged, the Department intends to remove.

I address the House as the long-standing treasurer of the all-party group on alternative and complementary medicine. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, I have monitored and taken a great interest in such issues for the best part of a decade. The Department's proposal to blacklist more than 200 nutritional supplements, making it impossible for general practitioners to prescribe them on the national health service, would bring to more than 600 the total of supplements so blacklisted in the past three years.

That move would seriously damage the health of many ill people, and wastes an opportunity to reduce prescription costs and improve patient care. The proposal is the result of recommendations by the so-called Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances. In its submission, the committee stated that the products in question

"have more economic alternatives"

and

"have not demonstrated a therapeutic value".

I hope to demonstrate to the House tonight and to persuade my hon. Friend that those contentions are completely wrong. Members of the BSAENM are doctors, and they say that many patients will suffer greatly if those vitamins and nutritional supplements are removed from the list. One estimate puts the potential savings to the NHS from improved nutrition for hospital patients alone at £266 million a year. GPs who are members of the BSAENM report similar savings in their practices. I suggest to my hon. Friend that the removal of these products is a false economy, benefiting neither the patient, the Department of Health nor taxpayers.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware as he travels the country how many chemists and shops now stock all kinds of vitamin supplements. My constituency contains the headquarters of Holland and Barrett, which has a massive warehouse, with all kinds of vitamins and supplements readily available. But these have to be paid for, unless they are available on the NHS. By agreeing to the proposals, my hon. Friend runs the risk of removing the opportunity for less well-off people to be treated. I am certain that many in my constituency and my county of Leicestershire will suffer if the proposals are accepted.

I gave the Minister notice of more or less exactly what I intended to say, and I have briefed him on a number of points that I was seeking to raise. On behalf of the BSAENM, I have also sent him a case study that amply demonstrates the problems that could be caused by the removal of those vitamins from the list. The case concerns Mrs. B. S., a 72-year-old retired nurse. I will not go through the whole case, but she suffered from water retention, arthritis and hypertension, and was treated using supplements.

Eventually, her doctors recommended that she came off that treatment—although it was helping her—and she was put on powerful drugs. Those drugs apparently made her much worse, and she turned to her nutritional medical adviser, who put her on a course of magnesium injections and magnesium amino acid chelate. At the moment, the supplements are provided on the NHS—and this is the point.

She responded well to treatment and, from being at death's door, she found that her weight and blood pressure dropped and she was altogether better. Without the magnesium and other supplements, I respectfully submit that this lady would probably pass away—the advice that I have been given is that she may have lived for about three months at most. This is the gravity of the situation we face, and that is why I have sought to give these important issues an airing.

There are certain specific points to which I want the Minister to respond. The first is the time that those in the field of nutritional medicine have been given to consider the proposals. According to the Department, the recommendations were published ahead of time to allow an opportunity to comment on them. But the release date of 25 November last year allowed only 45 days—including Christmas and new year—for responses to be prepared and submitted.

That may sound like a long time, but, as we are talking about 200 preparations, it works out at one hour per preparation for the submission of a proposal to retain a product on the prescription list. That is an inadequate period for consultation.

My second point is that the advisory committee has recommended that the products listed have not demonstrated a therapeutic value, or have more economic alternatives. This is a highly contentious statement, and the document does not specify which of those justifications has been applied to each item on the list. However, since it is the clear intention to blacklist most, if not all, of the readily available nutritional supplements, the suggestion that more economic alternatives are available is untenable.

In preparing its response, the society surveyed many of its members. Ninety-six per cent. considered that nutritional supplementation was essential to their method of practice. It is those practitioners who will suffer, and at a time when more and more people are turning to alternative and complementary medicines because they do not feel that the medicine available—good and proven though it is—on the national health service through conventional preparations and doctors is adequate.

People are voting with their feet. I referred to the enormous number of shops that now sell the preparations. They include high street chemists, which would not have considered selling them five or 10 years ago. My hon. Friend is in danger of undermining the use of these important supplements for those people who are unable to pay and must get them on the national health service.

[Mr. David Tredinnick]

Thirdly, the national health service executive says that other products will meet patients' clinical needs equally well. I have already referred to the lady who suffered from water retention and hypertension, who was put on magnesium. In that case, the magnesium was crucial, but it is one of the products listed in annex 2, along with 13 other magnesium or calcium and magnesium products. Not to coin an original phrase perhaps, but there is no alternative to that product—it is essential in the treatment of certain problems. There is no licensed multi-vitamin and mineral product with adequate potency for the treatment of those nutritional deficiencies.

The qualifications of the committees are another contentious issue—we come across this throughout the alternative and complementary medicine spectrum. The Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances has made the judgments, but it lacks the expertise to deal adequately with the issues. The practitioners with knowledge and experience of nutrition are simply not on that committee. Experts in the field need to be appointed to it. It is not good enough that committee members have some related experience. I suggest that the management of the committee should be modified to include medical practitioners with knowledge and experience of nutritional medicine.

My next and perhaps final point is that the Department contends that the selected list scheme has the aim of ensuring that all the real clinical needs of NHS patients can be met as economically as possible. That is such a contentious area. The national food survey in 1994 and the survey on the diets of British schoolchildren in 1986 stressed the need for certain minerals which are not necessarily readily available to the population in their diet, such as iron, zinc and magnesium. The survey of schoolchildren found that 95 per cent. of subjects had insufficient intakes of various minerals. Sometimes, it is necessary for those to be prescribed.

Doctors need that right, and it is good value, because, if people do not get them, they will become ill, and then they will become a burden on hospitals. It is a false economy to suggest that removing vitamins, which strengthen the immune system and the patients, and keep them out of expensive hospital care, is in the interests of the economy of the health service.

Another report, "Effective Nutritional Medicine", found that between 75 per cent. and 90 per cent. of cancers are attributable to environmental factors and can often be corrected—perhaps not cured—by nutritional medicines.

My final point concerns vitamin B6 and peripheral neuropathy. The issue is contentious, as my hon. Friend knows, because of the proposed removal of high doses of vitamin B6 from the list on the grounds that they are toxic. The society I mentioned submits that there is no evidence that toxicity begins at 50 mg a day for humans. Human evidence supports toxicity at 500 mg a day and upwards. There are various reports, as my hon. Friend knows, many of which date back a long time. The evidence is insufficient for the ban that is being canvassed. I encourage him to pause and reconsider this crucial issue.

I was looking at the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology technical report in the Library on treating problem behaviour in children. Bad diet is one of the problems that causes such behavioural difficulties. Vitamins can often right that. There is an educational angle to the matter. If children have the right supplements to their diet, their behaviour improves, they become less disruptive, and they live better lives.

On the threat to 200 vitamin supplements, my hon. Friend the Minister should suspend consideration of proposals for blacklisting nutritional supplements. Many hundreds have been blacklisted already. Important supplements such as magnesium are threatened now. I ask him please to think again.

Secondly, I ask my hon. Friend to review the membership of the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances with a view to appointing members with expertise in nutritional medicine and supplementation. The committee should at least give a fair hearing. Let us put judges in the court who understand the subject. At present, it is suspected that those who sit in judgment do not have sufficient expertise.

Thirdly, I ask my hon. Friend to consider retrospectively the position of supplements already blacklisted. Finally, I ask him further to consider the creation of a separate category of nutritional supplement that falls between those of licensed medicine and food supplement, with separate criteria and procedures, as outlined in previous correspondence. If he can respond positively to some of those points, he will improve the health and happiness of many people.

10.17 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): Such is the attraction of the invitation of my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) to improve by ministerial diktat the happiness and health of the nation that I might be tempted to accept, but I am not sure that it is within ministerial gift. However, I will try to help him. He has raised several important points with which I am happy to deal. I stand in need of some sort of nutritional supplement or form of medication to deal with my cold.

It may help my hon. Friend if I first set out the system. He said at the outset that supplements were being removed from lists of items that can be prescribed by doctors. That is not so, as will become clear as I explain the system. There is no NHS prescription list that says what products general practitioners can prescribe at NHS expense. The reverse is true: GPs are free to prescribe nutritional supplements or any other preparation for their patients unless they are included in the blacklist. The blacklist scores out some items that are available generally; it does not refer back to a list on which it has been decided to incorporate certain substances.

I shall give examples, which are extreme, but which illustrate the freedom of the medical profession. When I visited the prescription pricing agency in Newcastle, it had a number of interesting examples of items that GPs had prescribed. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might consider it unusual if, when you next visited your GP, he prescribed you a pint of Guinness, but it has been done—and done within the letter of the rules. Another example involved a prescription for a Christmas pudding.

The difficulty is that GPs who prescribe in that way must be prepared to justify challenges to their prescribing by the health authority . If the health authority decides that such items, or any other unlicensed products—be they

dietary foods, supplements or toiletries—should not be regarded as a drug for reimbursement purposes, the GP must justify the issue of the prescription. If justification cannot be given, the GP may be asked to repay the cost.

It is different when a pattern begins to emerge of a consistent habit of prescribing, at a cost to the NHS, certain specific products. That is the point on which my hon. Friend has concentrated tonight. When the spending level of such products becomes significant, it is referred to the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances for consideration.

The issue that my hon. Friend has raised relates to the recent public consultation on the addition of further items to the list of products that may not be prescribed at NHS expense. Those products included unlicensed dietary supplements. To understand the issue, it is important to emphasise the vital nature of the word "unlicensed"—it refers to a category of products that are separate from other products that have gained a licence, and are dealt with in a different way.

The list makes an important contribution—and has done for some years—to the Government's strategy to secure best value for money from the NHS drugs bill, and to secure the greatest benefit for patients. That is the point on which my hon. Friend wanted reassurance; he wanted to know that I had an open mind about what might constitute the greatest benefit to patients. I hope to say something helpful later.

The ACBS has an important role in our strategy, through its advice to Ministers on items that it considers should no longer be prescribable at NHS expense if it has not been demonstrated that they meet a therapeutic need in the community, or if they do not meet a need as economically as possible. If therapeutic value is in doubt, it is logical that the existence of alternatives is irrelevant.

The ACBS is aware that the Department's general advice is that most nutritional problems can be treated by dietary changes—that is the scheme's history. It was the view taken by the chief medical officer in the mid-1980s, when the scheme came into play; it is a view that still holds. I am sure that my hon. Friend and the House will agree that the supply of food—the best way to treat the deficiencies—to patients in the community is not a reasonable NHS function.

Not only does the ACBS consult the company involved before offering advice to Ministers, but there is a further period of consultation with interested bodies in advance of any final decision on changes. My hon. Friend mentioned the consultation period. I was of course concerned that there should be a proper period. I am not sure that the methodology employed by those who have lobbied on the matter—dividing the amount of time by the number of products—was necessarily accurate or the right method to use. But I can assure my hon. Friend that I was extremely concerned that there should be a proper period.

In fact, a longer period was allowed in view of the Christmas and new year holiday. I would point out that this is a consultation period that has precedent in previous and similar exercises, where the consultation period was deemed to be broadly satisfactory by all those participating.

Following the most recent such consultation, which began in November and did not end until 9 January, I carefully considered the comments made—indeed, I varied four of the original proposals put before me on the basis of the evidence gleaned from the consultation evidence. I assure my hon. Friend that time was provided, and that Ministers listened to what was said, leading to the original advice being changed as a result of the consultation.

I did consider the views of the society to which my hon. Friend referred, and also took account of the opinions of a whole range of learned societies that have a knowledge of these matters. Having been specifically consulted, many of them did not object to the proposals. For example, neither the Royal College of General Practitioners, nor the general medical services committee of the British Medical Association raised objections to the recommendations.

My hon. Friend specifically pressed me about the membership of the ACBS, and passed on others' suggestions that it lacks expertise on nutritional matters. That is not true. The committee consists of several people: my hon. Friend wanted reassurance that they had some involvement in nutrition, and I can tell him that the expertise of two of the members is specifically directed towards that field. Those members are Dr. Simon Allison, who is head of the nutrition team of the Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham; and, in a practical and more down-to-earth way, Ms Julie Fenton, who is the chief dietician at Queen Mary's university hospital, who has great insight into the sort of cases described by my hon. Friend.

Whatever the recommendations of the ACBS, it is open to the producers of high-strength multi-vitamin and mineral preparations to apply for their products to be licensed as medicines. They would have to provide evidence of the product's safety, quality and efficacy for the specified indications, and if they did so, a marketing authorisation could be granted.

That answers my hon. Friend's other point regarding a special category. There is no need to have a special category, because the way forward for those who market these products, if they think that they are of substantive therapeutic value, is simply to put them through the licensing process. If the products can be proven to be of therapeutic value, they, like all other products, will get a license, and will fall automatically within a category which can be prescribed by doctors.

I have some knowledge of what are commonly referred to, albeit slightly pejoratively, as alternative medicines. If there is a growing body of evidence of efficacy, which those who either market these products or claim that they have a worth are able to marshal, they will have a right—as would anyone else who claimed that their product had a therapeutic effect—to go through the licensing system so that the products could be available. I therefore issue something of a challenge to my hon. Friend: if the evidence is brought forward, it will be considered in an open way, which is the usual way in which evidence is considered on matters that may provoke a therapeutic change for the best.

I looked at the case study to which my hon. Friend referred, and I would be happy to look at further details, if he can provide them. It set out what were claimed to

[Mr. Gerald Malone]

be the facts of the matter, but I have to say that it was based substantially not on strong evidence, but on assertion. I should be happy to see better and further evidence—if such exists—to sustain the claims made for the product referred to in the study.

My hon. Friend referred to vitamin B6. To bring him up to date, I can tell him that officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health are meeting interested parties to discuss certain recommendations that have been made. Those interested parties have also been invited to submit any relevant data they might have which demonstrates that vitamin B6 is safe and of use. All such data that are received will be considered in full. That is the right way forward—there are no closed minds. I hope that my hon. Friend will find that answer helpful.

At the end of the day, I cannot give my hon. Friend specific assurances on his four points asking me to make concessions. The system we have works well, and it protects the national health service in terms of cost. It is a fair and open system, and, on this occasion, it has worked, and worked well.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 20 February 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

European Union Police Force

1. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Government's policy in respect of an EU–wide police force. [15277]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): A European Union police force is neither necessary nor desirable. Member states' police forces already co-operate closely and Europol will work increasingly with them to support their investigations. However, Europol will not conduct its own investigations or make arrests: those are properly matters for national law enforcement agencies regulated by national law.

Mr. Booth: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that on 29 January the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), said that if Labour ever came to power he would allow the police in Britain to be to some extent under the control of the European Court and the European Parliament? Will my right hon. and learned Friend condemn that nonsense?

Mr. Howard: Yes, I certainly will. My hon. Friend is right. The shadow Foreign Secretary was

"suggesting that some justice and home affairs issues, such as police co-operation . . . might be 'unbundled' and 'partially communitised', allowing the European parliament and court of justice to have a say in them."

That appeared in the *Financial Times* on 29 January 1997. Silence then ensued from the right hon. Gentleman until the matter was raised on Second Reading of the Police Bill on 12 February. Then, in a flurry of activity, a hasty denial was concocted and put out by the Opposition.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Home Secretary believe that the international money laundering and drugs business—a £1 billion industry—needs the tightest possible co-ordination between police forces to deal with financial and commercial fraud? That does not happen now. Should not the Home Secretary drop his ridiculous play acting to be the next Leader of the Opposition and get down to the real work of tackling massive international fraud?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must do all we can to tackle international fraud and money laundering, but if he thinks that the way to tackle those problems effectively is to give the European Parliament a say in them or to make them subject to the European Court of Justice, he could not be more mistaken.

Mr. John Greenway: Despite that answer, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it would be totally wrong to regard Britain as dragging its feet over European issues of law and order when in fact we are ahead of most other countries in ratifying the convention to create Europol, and when the measures in the Police Bill mean that Britain will have a better method of disseminating information to Europol than exists in other countries?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. We were the first country to ratify the Europol convention, which means that we are in the forefront of effective European co-operation in these matters. Indeed, at an earlier stage in the process, when it looked as though the whole Europol project might founder on fundamental disagreements between France and Germany, the United Kingdom was able to bring them together and broker an agreement so as to make progress on Europol possible.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does not the idea of an EU-wide police force raise some interesting possibilities? Might it not mean, for instance, that members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary would begin to serve in the Republic of Ireland?

Mr. Howard: I suspect that mixed feelings might greet that proposal and also what I imagine would be its concomitant—the Gardai having operational responsibility in Northern Ireland. When those implications are pointed out, even countries on the continent of Europe which purport to favour communitising the third pillar think several times before pursuing such projects with any enthusiasm.

Mr. Garnier: If we were to have an EU-wide police force, would my right hon. and learned Friend agree that that police force should be allowed in court to comment on the failure of a defendant to speak to that police force while it was investigating a crime?

Mr. Howard: As I have made clear, I am not in favour of a Europe-wide police force, but I take some comfort from the fact that the introduction of our reform to the right to silence in this country in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994—which was bitterly opposed, spoken against and voted against by the Leader of the Opposition when he was shadow Home Secretary—has led to a reduction of almost 50 per cent. in the number of suspects who refuse to answer questions put to them by the police. As a result of that change, guilty men who previously would have walked free from the courts are now being convicted in the courts of this country almost every day.

Mr. Straw: As it has been the long-standing and agreed policy of the Labour party that matters of border control, immigration, asylum and police should all be dealt with intergovernmentally and that there should be no question of any Europe-wide police force, why does the Home Secretary seek to invent our policy in order to attack us? Does he recall that, on 12 February, as reported at column 358 of *Hansard*, he claimed that my right hon. Friend

the shadow Foreign Secretary had issued a press release indicating a change of policy? There has been no change of policy and no such press release exists.

Mr. Howard: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is a simple one: the shadow Foreign Secretary gave an interview to the *Financial Times*, an account of that interview was published in the *Financial Times* and that report said that the shadow Foreign Secretary had suggested

"that some justice and home affairs issues . . . such as police co-operation might be 'unbundled' and 'partially communitised', allowing the European parliament and court of justice to have a say in them."

No denial of that report was issued until we drew it to the attention of the House on 12 February.

West Midlands Fire and Civil Defence Authority

2. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning West Midlands fire and civil defence authority. [15278]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Tom Sackville): There have been two such representations in the past six months: one about the fire brigade's bid under the capital challenge pilot scheme, which I am glad to say resulted in an award of £3 million to build a new fire station at Handsworth, and the other about civil defence grant.

Mr. Purchase: Is the Minister unaware that the grant to the West Midlands fire service is now less in real terms than it was in 1992, that it has lost an aggregate of £16.5 million since the last election? Is he unaware of the great stress in the fire services resulting from having to deal with so many different problems—motorway crashes, difficult access and, in some cases, abuse on difficult estates? Is he completely unaware of the stress that firefighters feel, or is it just another case of our being unable to trust this Government—especially when they are playing with fire?

Mr. Sackville: I have no doubts about the difficulties of the job, but the hon. Gentleman should remember, first, that the national standards for levels of fire cover are agreed, not by us, but in the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, on which all the fire service organisations are represented. Secondly, the standard spending assessment for the West Midlands service went up this year by 6.9 per cent. which will allow additional spending of over 6 per cent. I see no commitment from the Labour party to spend any more on fire services.

DNA Database

3. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many samples there are on the national DNA database; and how many matches have been made between suspects and samples. [15280]

Mr. Howard: As at the end of January 1997, the national DNA database held more than 112,000 profiles taken from suspected or convicted persons and more than 9,000 crime scene stain profiles and there had been more than 2,000 matches between suspects and scenes of crime.

Mr. Evans: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that DNA testing is an important tool in our armoury to fight crimes against individuals? Does he also agree that its vital importance was shown in one famous case where a 78-year-old lady had been raped by a drug addict and, thanks to DNA testing, the suspect's alibi was put aside, with the result that he was convicted and is now serving 10 years in prison? Will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that DNA testing gets the full backing that it deserves, along with all those other tools that we are currently using, such as closed circuit television and ensuring that there are more police on the beat?

Mr. Howard: I certainly will. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the Criminal Evidence (Amendment) Bill, which he is guiding through the House and which will enable the DNA profiles of about 7,750 serious sexual or violent offenders and those who commit burglaries with convictions prior to April 1995 who are still in custody to be added to the database. That will increase the protection available to my hon. Friend's constituents in Ribble Valley and to others throughout the country.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What is the percentage incidence of matching error?

Mr. Howard: I cannot give an immediate answer to that question, but I am perfectly prepared to let the hon. Gentleman have it. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) laughs from the Opposition Front Bench as though that would invalidate the tremendous success of the DNA database, illustrating yet again the frivolity of the Labour party's attitude to these important issues. The DNA database is a tremendous success: it is the first national DNA database in the world and it is likely, in the fullness of time, to revolutionise the way in which the police can tackle crime and protect the public. Yet all that Members on the Labour Front Bench can do is giggle.

Asylum Seekers

4. **Mr. Deva:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people claimed asylum in (a) 1995 and (b) 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15281]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): A total of 43,965 applications for asylum were made in 1995 and 27,930 in 1996, representing a 36 per cent. decrease on the previous year. This substantial fall in the numbers claiming asylum clearly demonstrates the success of the measures that we have taken to deter undeserving applications.

Mr. Deva: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is she aware that this year marks the 25th anniversary of the resettlement—under a Conservative Government—of the Ugandan Asians who were kicked out of Uganda by Idi Amin? Is she aware of what a great success story they are in this country—unlike the Kenyan Asians, who were not allowed to settle in this country by a Labour Government?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend demonstrates how important it is that we give asylum to genuine asylum

seekers. That has always been the policy of Conservative Governments and, indeed, it will remain the policy of Conservative Governments. As my hon. Friend has demonstrated, the Opposition talk much about more care of asylum seekers, but their record does not match their words. I support my hon. Friend's view of the contribution made to the economy by those who settled under the concession that the Conservative Government gave at that time; I welcome very much their contribution to the economy and I thank my hon. Friend for reminding the House of it.

Mr. Gerrard: If the Minister is so anxious to assist genuine asylum seekers, why is it that in 1996, although three quarters of the people granted asylum were in-country applicants, she took benefits away from precisely those people through the Asylum and Immigration Bill?

Miss Widdecombe: Our view has always been that those who seek asylum in this country should tell us honestly what they are about at the point of entry from the ports. It does not follow that there is never such a thing as a valid in-country applicant; we have never said that. Some in-country applicants have entered validly and circumstances have then changed in their home country, so there is no particular point to be made on that score. The point that we would make, however, is that far too many loopholes were being exploited by people who entered the country in one guise, turned around and claimed asylum and then, despite having convinced immigration officers and entry clearance officers that they could keep themselves, turned to the state for support. We did not believe that that was reasonable.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, between 1986 and 1996, there was a tenfold increase in the number of asylum seekers wanting to come to this country, nine out of 10 of whom were bogus, but that the number fell by nearly 50 per cent. when we tightened benefit arrangements? Does she agree that any political party which trumpeted to the world that it was tough on the abuse of benefit and then connived at and tried to support the ripping off of the British taxpayer to the extent of £300 million per year would be hypocritical in the extreme, and was that not Labour party policy?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. and learned Friend sums it up admirably. It is worth reflecting that the reason why there was such a vast increase in asylum applications in this country at that time was that the rest of Europe had already decided to toughen up on its procedures because they were being so abused. It is significant that, whereas applications in this country doubled over that period, they halved in the rest of Europe. That made it clear that we had become the focus for abuse, and it is our duty to the British taxpayer to avoid and combat abuse wherever possible. Labour Members talk about being tough and fair, but they have been unable to tell us a single thing that they would do which would benefit genuine asylum applicants and at the same time deter bogus ones. They have consistently dodged that important question.

Mr. Henderson: Before the right hon. Lady gets too carried away with self-congratulation in playing her asylum card, will she acknowledge two statistics? First, in 1996 the waiting time for dealing with an application increased from 10 months to 12 months. Secondly, the number of people waiting to have an appeal heard has increased from 3,500 at the beginning of 1995 to more than 20,000 today. Do not those statistics show that the system is still ineffective and unfair? It is ineffective because those who will be granted asylum have to suffer worry and anxiety, while those who will not be granted asylum are allowed to stay here for months and sometimes years before they are removed.

Miss Widdecombe: It is true that genuine asylum applicants sometimes have to wait too long because the queues are clogged up with bogus applications. It was in the interests of genuine asylum seekers that we undertook those measures. Opposition Members have never been able to face up to that: they constantly confuse measures against bogus asylum seekers with welcoming and helping, in due speedy time, genuine asylum seekers.

Let me correct the hon. Gentleman's statistics. In 1996, 38,960 decisions were taken: that figure is not down, but up by 44 per cent. on the number taken in 1995. The number of adjudicator appeals determined in 1996 was 13,790—nearly twice as many as in 1995. That is as a result of the extra money and extra case workers that we have put in. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman does his homework a little better.

Youth Workers Agency

5. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of (a) establishing and (b) running for 12 months the proposed agency for recording and divulging information on the records of people who wish to work with young people. [15282]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): It is our intention that the Criminal Records Agency will be self-financing. We intend to recoup the costs of setting up and running the agency by charging applicants for criminal record certificates a very modest fee.

Mr. Rowe: While I accept the Government's good intentions and welcome the setting up of the register, does my hon. Friend agree that one of the objectives of the "make a difference" initiative is to make it easier for volunteers to come from classes other than those that are well off? New recruits will be put off volunteering if we say, "Thank you so much for volunteering, but it will cost you £10 before you even begin." Will my hon. Friend look closely at that matter and see what he can do?

Mr. Kirkhope: I know how concerned and interested my hon. Friend is in voluntary agencies. It is as a result of the Government's wish to see voluntary agencies prosper and for those involved in their work to be certain of the security of others involved that we have set about establishing the agency. The fees concerned are extremely modest: £5 for a basic certificate and £8 or £10 for an enhanced certificate—for instance, when young children are involved, which seems reasonable. I should like to be able to offer my hon. Friend greater comfort. We have agreed to table an amendment to the Police Bill,

which will have an order-making power so that, when financial circumstances allow, we can revisit the matter with a view to giving assistance where necessary.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Minister recall that some years ago we started setting up a national criminal records computer? I do not know how far that got or whether it was ever brought fully into play. If it is fully in play—I see the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), nodding—we already have the source. Surely it is not beyond the wit of a prospective volunteer to go into a police station and obtain a certificate of no known convictions. In that way, no charge would be payable.

Mr. Kirkhope: All such matters have cost implications. We want a national agency to be available to help the private and voluntary sector, in particular. It is true that there is a possibility of information being available through the public sector, but because of incidents that have unfortunately occurred too often recently in the voluntary and private sector, it is essential that protection should be available on a national basis to organisations that want to obtain it. We believe that the agency will be extremely helpful in giving security of mind to parents and others concerned with the work of voluntary bodies.

Mr. Brazier: I welcome that important step forward in protecting the nation's children. Will my hon. Friend confirm that he is also giving sympathetic consideration to the needs of the other key group affected—organisations which cater for adults with learning difficulties?

Mr. Kirkhope: We are bringing in an amendment to ensure, as my hon. Friend said, that those who care and have responsibility for vulnerable adults will also be able to benefit from the agency.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I share the Minister's desire for procedures that will offer protection, but I am not happy with the answers given on an earlier occasion, which suggested that charitable bodies will be first in line. They will be subject to double taxation: not only has their income been reduced by the lottery, but they are to be charged for these warrants. I ask that further consideration be given before the proposal is implemented.

Mr. Kirkhope: It is individuals, rather than organisations, who would be asked to make a small investment. That is not to say that organisations that can afford to assist would not do so, but it is the responsibility of individuals. Had we resourced the entire list of organisations in the sector, the cost might have been anything up to several hundred million pounds. We shall review the position when resources allow and consider particularly vulnerable areas for assistance.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that it is essential for adults to come forward to help with youth organisations, and that that has been of great benefit as it brings together young and old? Does he accept that society as a whole should pay for the proposed agency through taxation? I do not wish in any way to deter people from coming forward to help in a voluntary capacity with the entire range of youth organisations, and I am sure that that view is shared by Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Kirkhope: If I thought that the sum of £5 would deter large numbers of volunteers, my hon. Friend would of course be right. We believe, however, that that is a modest sum to find. We do not want to deter volunteers. The Government are playing their part in bringing forward proposals for the agency which we think are overdue and will work well.

Alison Halford

6. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the European Court of Human Rights and Ms Alison Halford, former assistant chief constable of Merseyside. [15283]

Mr. Howard: As Ms Halford's case is currently before the European Court of Human Rights, it would not be right for me to comment on it.

Mr. Jones: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree to see me and Ms Halford to discuss this complicated matter? Will the Department make an apology to my constituent for tapping her office telephone, on the understanding that she was an excellent crime buster and not a criminal? Will the Department seriously and urgently consider compensation for my constituent, who has suffered a grave injustice? Some uniformed officers have a great deal to answer for in that distressing case.

Mr. Howard: No. The hon. Gentleman's constituent has taken her case to the European Court of Human Rights and that litigation must take its course.

Mr. Marlow: As Home Secretary in a mature democracy whose courts have an unrivalled reputation throughout the world, has my right hon. and learned Friend ever been tempted to seek to withdraw the United Kingdom from the jurisdiction of that foreign court?

Mr. Howard: I am frequently tempted by all sorts of things, but the advantages of our continued adherence to the European convention on human rights and the European Court outweigh the disadvantages. Therefore, I think that we should continue to adhere to that convention.

Police Forces (Wales)

8. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the establishment of police forces in Wales; and which forces are employing police officers up to their establishment. [15285]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): At the end of September 1996 there were 6,522 police officers in Wales, including 166 more constables than in 1992. It is for individual chief constables and police authorities to determine the number of officers in the force, having regard to the resources available to them.

Mr. Griffiths: My information is slightly different from that of the Minister. Nevertheless, the increase that

he says is correct amounts to only about 1 per cent. of the total in Wales. The number of police in the Gwent and South Wales forces, which serve more than two thirds of the Welsh population, has actually decreased. Will the Minister confirm that the police in Wales and in other parts of the United Kingdom have responsibility for the security of the slaughtered carcases and rendered remains of cattle as a result of the BSE crisis? If they are not responsible for that security, who is?

Mr. Maclean: I am glad that I can update the hon. Gentleman's information, because I am afraid that it is wrong as well as out of date. The Dyfed-Powys force, which has received extra resources over the years, is heading towards a record high number of officers. It is the same in Gwent—and not just because 200 officers have been transferred from South Wales. The North Wales force also has a record high number of officers—as would South Wales, but for the 200 transferred with the Rhymney valley.

All the police forces in Wales have received exceptionally generous funding from this Government. They have 424 more officers than in 1979, and 166 more since 1992. They are on course to have a further 300 officers as a result of the funding that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has promised.

Mr. Llwyd: The Minister will be aware of the sex abuse inquiry taking place in north Wales. Is he aware that that will cost the police force there more than £1 million from its current budget? What assistance can he provide to that already cash-strapped police force?

Mr. Maclean: It is nonsense to say that the North Wales police force is cash strapped: it has received very generous funding. However, the hon. Gentleman should know that there is provision for a police force to apply to the Home Office in certain exceptional circumstances if events affect its budget. I am willing to hear representations at any time from the chief constable of the North Wales force about the matter, but he would need to satisfy the well established criteria for supplementary funding.

Metropolitan Police

9. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of police officers serving in the Metropolitan police. [15289]

Mr. Howard: The Commissioner assures me that the settlement for the Metropolitan police for 1997–98 will enable him to increase officer strength to 27,400 during 1997.

Mr. Timms: In reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker), the Minister provided figures on 18 February at columns *532-35* showing that the number of Metropolitan police constables has fallen across London since 1992. In the past year, the number of constables has decreased in the Forest Gate district which serves my constituency and in London as a whole. Did the Home Secretary see the article in *The Daily Telegraph* last month which reported that London's only local stolen vehicles squad is to be disbanded—even though it raises £500,000 per year—because of cuts? Why do the Government continually promise so much and then fail to deliver?

Mr. Howard: Let me put the hon. Gentleman right on the facts. Since the last election, more than 800 extra uniformed constables have been made available to Metropolitan police divisions for operational duties—an increase of 6 per cent. Furthermore, the proportion of time that divisional constables spend on patrol has increased significantly in recent years.

I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be more interested in congratulating the Metropolitan police on their results in the London borough of Newham, where total notifiable offences have fallen by more than 10 per cent. in the past three years, recorded residential burglaries by more than 20 per cent., recorded sexual offences by nearly 70 per cent., and recorded violence against the person by more than 20 per cent.

Mr. Tracey: Although I would always be one of the first London Members to encourage my right hon. and learned Friend to increase the number of police officers in London, surely the point is that there are 4,500 more police officers in London than there were under the last Labour Government, and spending on the Metropolitan police, taking account of inflation, has gone up by nearly 90 per cent.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The strength of the Metropolitan police is more than 20 per cent. greater—one fifth as much again—than when we took office. That is the background against which questions such as that asked by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) need to be considered.

Mr. Simon Hughes: May I preface my remarks by asking the Home Secretary to join me in sending condolences to all at Walworth police station? Two of its officers and the son of a third officer were drowned in the Solent last night. Only one officer survived. The whole of the force serving my constituency and much of south-east London will be devastated by the loss of people from three families. As we all value police officers so much, when will the number of officers in London be restored to that of five years ago?

Mr. Howard: I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in extending my most sincere condolences to the families of the officers who lost their lives last night and to all those who worked with them, who will have been deeply affected by that loss.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East. More than 800 extra uniformed constables have been made available to Metropolitan police divisions for operational duties since the election—an increase of 6 per cent. The Commissioner assures me that the settlement for 1997–98 will enable him to increase officer strength to 27,400 during 1997.

Sir Michael Shersby: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the pressures on the Metropolitan Commissioner to deploy more officers to central and south-east London to deal with crime—particularly terrorism—need to be widely recognised and understood? Does he accept that that creates concern in some areas of outer London, from which police officers have had to be

redeployed? What additional funds is he making available to the Metropolitan police to deal with the particular problems that they face in policing our capital city?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The demands that the Commissioner has to meet are many and various. The way in which he deploys his resources to deal with those demands is, of course, an operational matter for him.

For the coming financial year, 1997–98, the Metropolitan police will receive an extra £55 million—a 3.4 per cent. increase on the 1996–97 allocation. That is a very good settlement.

Mr. Michael: The Home Secretary should stop deliberately confusing the terms "constable" and "police officer". The Prime Minister promised additional police officers. The Home Secretary cannot claim credit for the police settlement, when the total Government contribution to the Metropolitan police is increasing by only 1.7 per cent., and, according to his figures, he is putting an additional 16 per cent. burden on local council tax payers.

Is it not a sign of the Home Secretary's failed stewardship that, as I learned today, the March intake of recruits to be trained as constables in the Metropolitan police has been cancelled to save money? Those 75 constables will not go on to the streets of London. Is he aware of that cancellation? Does he blame himself or the Prime Minister for the broken promise of extra police?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's question is utterly astonishing. As recently as 29 January, he told the House:

"The amount of money available"

under a Labour Government

"will certainly not change."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1997; Vol. 289, c. 472.]

The Labour party says that if it were ever to get into government, it would not provide any more money. Will it put an end to the hypocrisy of Labour Front Benchers popping up day after day in the House asking for more to be spent on everything?

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my right hon. and learned Friend acknowledge that, notwithstanding the fact that we have spent more money on the police force in the capital, the process of civilianisation has managed to put more policemen on the beat in proportion to the number of officers who are brought into the service? Perhaps he would like to correct the nonsense.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Since 1979, we have not only increased the number of police officers by 20 per cent., but have improved the quality of the policing of the Metropolis by increasing substantially the number of civilians who do jobs that previously the police had to do, thus freeing police officers for operational duties on the streets.

Asylum Applicants

10. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review his policy on the detention of asylum applicants. [15290]

Mr. Howard: Detention is used very sparingly, and only when there are good grounds for believing that a person will not comply with the terms of temporary admission. We have no plans to review our policy on detention: its carefully targeted use is vital if we are to uphold our immigration laws.

Mr. Cohen: Did the Government's use of prolonged detention not cost taxpayers £20 million last year? Did it not flout the opinion of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who believes that detention should be used only in exceptional circumstances and for a maximum of 48 hours? As more than 20 per cent. of asylum seekers were detained for longer than 48 hours, does that not make a mockery of the Government's claim that detention is used as a last resort? Instead of the Government taking unlimited judicial powers, should there not be a maximum time limit on detention and judicial safeguards?

Mr. Howard: No. At any time, only about 1 per cent. of those with asylum applications outstanding are held in detention. Detention is used sparingly, and for those who would otherwise abscond. If we did not use detention in that way, it would make a mockery of our immigration controls.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: May I assure my right hon. and learned Friend that the vast majority of people in this country think that he and the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), have behaved entirely reasonably on this matter? May I condemn the campaign of personal vilification of them that has been conducted without restraint?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but my right hon. Friend and I have broad shoulders. We take considerable comfort from the fact that the changes that we have made to our asylum and immigration laws, which were bitterly opposed by the Labour party, have led to a halving of the number of applications for asylum in this country, and to substantial savings for the British taxpayer.

Mr. Corbyn: What steps has the Home Secretary taken to review the cases of the people on hunger strike at Her Majesty's prison in Rochester, who are seeking asylum in this country? What policy will he pursue to deal with the problem of people who go on hunger strike to draw attention to their just grievances against him and his Department?

Mr. Howard: All such cases are of course kept under review, but I do not think that it would be at all right for us to give special preference to certain cases because those involved happen to go on hunger strike. We try to deal with every case as quickly and justly as possible.

Drug Abuse (Prisons)

11. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what strategies the Prison Service has in place for combating drug abuse in prisons. [15291]

Miss Widdecombe: The Prison Service drugs strategy was launched in April 1995. It balances tougher controls,

including mandatory drugs testing to limit the supply of drugs in prisons, with a greater range of treatment options for prisoners identified as drug misusers.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the worst aspects of illicit drug use in prisons is the pressure that it puts on particularly vulnerable prisoners? Does she agree that, if it were thought that a more restricted visiting regime was the only way of stamping out drug misuse, such a regime should be introduced, even if it produced the inevitable squealing from civil liberty lobbies?

Miss Widdecombe: Prisoners who are found with drugs that are believed to have been passed to them during visits can already be put on closed visits for a period. We also now have cameras in most visiting rooms, visitors are carefully searched, and prisoners are searched both before and after visits. We are also making more use of drug dogs. We have a tough policy in place to combat the use of drugs.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February. [15307]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. O'Hara: Is the Prime Minister aware that, despite all the Government's attempts to massage and manipulate the figures, national health service waiting lists are again at record levels? There is a waiting list of 179,000 in my area of the north-west alone. Could it just be that the Government's policy of replacing 50,000 nurses with 20,000 managers and doubling the price of bureaucracy has something to do with this crisis?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is mistaken.

Mr. Mackinlay: No, he is not.

The Prime Minister: Yes he is, and I will explain precisely why.

Waiting lists are broadly the same as last year. They have fallen very dramatically during the present Parliament. If the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) would care to look at the figures for the period before the health reforms and the patients charter, he will see that more than 200,000 people had waited for more than a year, of whom 80,000 had waited for more than two years. At the end of December, only 2 per cent. of patients—22,000—had been waiting for more than a year, and the number who had waited for more than 18 months was down to 123.

The fact is that more people are being treated, they are being treated more swiftly, and they are being treated better.

Q2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February. [15308]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that last month the Treasury repaid £6,000 million of debt? Will he also confirm that, if anyone sought to spend an extra £30,000 million of public money, they could do so only by increasing taxes, increasing borrowing and increasing interest rates, all of which would put an end to the economic recovery that is the envy of the whole of the rest of western Europe?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is correct on both counts. Certainly, if anything remotely approximating to £30,000 million were spent in the next Parliament in addition to current spending plans, taxes and interest rates would rise, and I have no doubt that it would have very severe effects on the economy as a whole. As for debt, I was delighted to see that £6 billion had been repaid in the past month—

Mr. Skinner: Who put it up?

The Prime Minister: I will just remind the hon. Gentleman that we have a lower debt ratio than any other major economy in Europe. I will remind him that, in every single year since we came to power, the debt ratio has been lower than in any single year in which he supported a Labour Government.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree with his Chancellor that although, of course, the Government are hostile to a single currency on a non-convergent basis, the Government—I quote the Chancellor—

"doesn't have a hostile attitude to the single currency . . . The position remains that we have an open option."

Those words were repeated by the Deputy Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister repeat those words and say that he agrees specifically with his Chancellor and his Deputy Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Of course, if there were not arguments in both directions, we would not have kept our options open. Of course I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister has said in very clear terms that he agrees with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Will he disown Conservative central office, which has been briefing that, in effect, he has closed the option of joining a single currency?

The Prime Minister: No one has been briefing to that effect. The Cabinet set out its position some time ago. It has been reaffirmed on a number of occasions. I reaffirm it again today. It was set out perfectly clearly. The right hon. Gentleman can forget the minor textual exegesis and

stick with the facts: that the policy was set out perfectly clearly and that that remains the policy. I hope that the leader of the Labour party might now care to examine the different statements of members of his shadow Cabinet over recent weeks.

Q3. **Dr. Goodson–Wickes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February. [15309]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Goodson–Wickes: Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the superb and often inadequately recognised work carried out by the Prince of Wales's group of charities? Quite apart from offering practical help to more than 150,000 young people, it has established more than 60,000 jobs. Will my right hon. Friend endorse the project that I visited in my constituency this week, where the Prince's Trust rehabilitated a park? By such projects young people take practical steps to serve their local community, while at the same time establishing self-reliance.

The Prime Minister: I am happy to do that. Voluntary service plays a very important part in the fabric of life in this country, and I know of no nation in the world in which the sum total of voluntary service matches that of the United Kingdom. The work done by the Prince's Trust and other voluntary bodies is absolutely magnificent, and the Government will continue to give their support to it.

Mr. Ashdown: Let us see. Last week, the Health Secretary told us that the Conservatives would abolish a Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Secretary said, oh no, they would not. Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary said that the Government were hostile to a single currency and the Chancellor said, oh no, they were not. Has it yet occurred to the Prime Minister what is so plain and evident to everybody else—that his divided Cabinet has given up fighting for the interests of the country and has started instead to fight for his job after the election?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's commitment openly and certainly honestly—I concede that—to put up the rate of income tax will certainly help to keep me here on this Bench after the election.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does not my right hon. Friend have sympathy for the victims of the failed cultural revolution? In Islington, for example, it is estimated that up to 50 per cent. of children are educated outside the borough. What does he have to say to those poor parents who are now driven to flee from a Labour administration and become educational refugees across the face of London?

The Prime Minister: I think that it was the leader of the Labour party who said, "You can't tell what a Government is like until it is in power." In Islington, Labour is in power, and my hon. Friend points out vividly what it is like. If parents are fleeing Islington, as we understand they are, it certainly is a new version of the term "school run".

Sanctions (Libya)

Q4. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Clinton the consequences for (a) the imposition of sanctions on Libya and (b) the case against Libyan nationals of the dismissal of James Thurman from the service of the United States Government. [15310]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. The case against the two accused Libyans does not depend on any evidence that Mr. Thurman might give.

Mr. Dalyell: Has Thurman been reassigned to other duties for fabricating forensic evidence?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly not aware that that is the case. If the hon. Gentleman has any information that it is, or any information that he thinks bears on this matter—

Mr. Dalyell: It is in the *New York Times*.

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I am not an avid and daily reader of the *New York Times*. If he has any information that is pertinent to this case, and would care to provide me with it, I will certainly undertake to have it carefully examined.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As senior Scottish advocates have said that it would be impossible for the two accused to have a fair trial in Scotland because of press publicity, and as the Libyan Government have now stated that they will hand over the two accused to the Arab League for committal to trial in The Hague or anywhere else, would it not help those who lost their relatives and friends at Lockerbie to have the issue resolved? My right hon. Friend is, as we all know, basically a straight, decent person, so will he endeavour to solve the problem and stop simply engaging in the throwing of insults? Could we not solve it in the interests of those who lost their relatives and friends at Lockerbie?

The Prime Minister: I certainly want a solution to this problem. We would like a solution as much as the relatives, but we need a proper criminal trial and there are genuine and practical difficulties in trying to establish such a trial in a third country. I think that many hon. Members, including—if my hon. Friend will permit me to say so—me, would, on grounds of principle, find a trial in a third country very difficult to accept. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] I shall tell hon. Members why. It could suggest that a trial in Scotland or the United States would not be fair.

I am not prepared to accept that premise in terms of a trial in Scotland. Nor do I think that it would be remotely attractive for us to allow alleged terrorists to dictate where they may or may not be tried. That would be a bad principle. The Security Council resolutions say that they should be tried in Scotland or the United States—two countries with a particular interest in the matter.

I have to add that I am very doubtful that the Libyans would deliver the accused for such a trial, even if one were to be set up, but, for the reasons that I have set out, the trial should be either in Scotland, which would be the preference, or in the United States.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February. [15311]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McKelvey: Does the Prime Minister share my genuine concern about the outrageous activities of the directors of Camelot in attempting to take gambling on the lottery into every home in the land and extend their links with rather devious gambling projects abroad? Would it not be possible for him to stop this development? Otherwise, he will leave a legacy of children who were brought up in the midst of gambling mania.

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the lottery is very tightly regulated and there will be no changes to the structure or content of the constituent games without the specific involvement of the director general. The Government have no intention of allowing the good name of the lottery to be jeopardised. I think that the hon. Gentleman would share my pleasure at the sheer scale of the resources produced by the lottery for good causes. Today, for example, the heritage lottery fund is awarding £140 million to 24 of the nation's best loved museums.

Mr. Stephen: Does my right hon. Friend agree that efficient professional administration is vital to the success of the national health service? Does he recall that, when we decided to modernise the system by getting rid of the whole regional tier of NHS bureaucracy, the Labour party was against it? What does he therefore think of its promises to save money on NHS bureaucracy?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that there were substantial savings to be made by the abolition of the regional health authority tier, and that those savings were opposed by the Labour party. The health service is one of the most efficient health services in the world and, in terms of management expenditure, it is now 25 per cent. more efficient than in 1979.

Electoral Registration

Q6. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will introduce proposals to encourage registration on supplementary lists of those missing from electoral registers before the announcement of the date of the general election. [15312]

The Prime Minister: I see no need to do so. The vast majority of eligible electors are registered and a well-established claims procedure exists for those who are not.

Mr. Barnes: Why will the Government not publish the number of people who are currently on electoral registers? What have they got to hide? Are the figures as bad as they were last year, when at least 2 million people were missing from the registers? Why cannot we have a massive campaign to put people on supplementary lists, which could be added to lists of those who are eligible to vote at the general election? The Halifax building society organised a massive campaign for what it called its "big vote". The general election is the biggest vote of all, and all our people should be entitled to exercise their vote.

The Prime Minister: I, of course, agree with that. The Conservative party has done all it can to ensure that people are registered to vote at the general election. As for the figures for which the hon. Gentleman asked, the 1996 electoral registers for the United Kingdom contained just under 44 million names—the highest number ever. New registers came into force on 16 February, and the figures for them should be available by the end of March.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for details of future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be as follows: MONDAY 24 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day [6th allotted day].

There will be a debate on the national health service on an Opposition motion.

TUESDAY 25 FEBRUARY—Until about 7 pm, Second Reading of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Bill *[Lords]*.

Proceedings on the following Bills, which are consolidation measures: the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*; the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*; the Planning (Hazardous Substances) (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*; and the Planning (Consequential Provisions) (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the National Heritage Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Civil Procedure Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Sex Offenders Bill.

WEDNESDAY 26 FEBRUARY—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Motion on section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act.

Remaining stages of the Contract (Scotland) Bill.

Remaining stages of the Scottish Legal Services Ombudsman and Commissioner for Local Administration in Scotland Bill.

Remaining stages of the Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill.

THURSDAY 27 FEBRUARY—Debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 28 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

Once again, I am unable to give much information about the following week, but on Monday 3 March I expect to propose that we take the remaining stages of the Welsh Development Agency Bill.

The House will also wish to know, Madam Speaker, that on Wednesday 5 March there will be a debate on the Court of Auditors reports in European Standing Committee B. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report.*

[Wednesday 5 March:European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community Documents: (a) OJ C340, Court of Auditors' Report for 1995; (b) OJ C395, Court of Auditors' Statement of Assurance for 1995; (c) Court of Auditors' Statement of Assurance for 1995: European Development Funds. Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports: (a) and (b) HC 36-xii (1996-97); (c) HC 36-xiv (1996-97).]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House.

The right hon. Gentleman has announced that Labour's choice of debate in Opposition time on Monday is the national health service. Will he ensure that the Secretary of State for Health is prepared to give full answers about why his stewardship of that office has led to the longest waiting lists in hospitals? Despite the Prime Minister's assurances earlier this afternoon, the official figures show that there are now more than 1 million people waiting for their operations, and that in the last quarter there has been an increase of 21,900 in those waiting longer than a year for their operation. May we have a fully informed debate on Monday rather than one in which those questions are dodged?

As the Labour party has provided time for a debate on health, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on another aspect of Government policy that is causing misery to millions transport? In recent days—the fiascos have been coming fast and furious. We have had the crisis confronting London Underground because of the "will they, won't they?" question about its privatisation. The services provided by South West Trains have been in disarray because of the company's utter incompetence, which led to 70 drivers being sacked and the cancellation of 39 trains a day. Recently, we have had the obscene profiteering of four fat cats who bought Eversholt Train Leasing Ltd. at a knock-down price and who have made massive personal profits. Surely the House has a right to debate those issues.

Will the Leader of the House tell us what has happened to the Government's proposals for a building societies Bill? The matter has been buried despite the promises that have been made over the past two years. Can he tell us why it has been buried, and what the Government intend to do to allay the fears and uncertainty in the building society industry?

Is the Leader of the House aware that the Department of Trade and Industry has terminated the trades fair support scheme? The scheme, which generated £400 million in new exports and covered its own costs, was of enormous benefit to many firms across the country, including Sinclaire Fabrics, in my constituency. Those firms now believe that Government policy is undermining their export effort. As the termination has not been debated in the House, may we have such a debate so that the House can discuss the scheme's valuable contributions, and so that the Government might reconsider their position because of the concern among the public and hon. Members?

Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the Secretary of State for the Environment's barmy scheme to revive the stately home? Such a debate would afford the Secretary of State an opportunity to explain why he is more concerned about the housing arrangements and planning difficulties of a handful of millionaires than he is about affordable homes for thousands of homeless people in Britain.

Mr. Newton: Taking the last point first, I think that it was a rather odd one for the hon. Lady to raise. Last week was national empty homes week, in which the Government were making a major effort to continue the progress that is being made in reducing the number of empty homes across the country. The background, of course, is that Labour authorities are among the worst performers, and the number of empty local authority homes has risen, whereas the total is falling.

Obviously I will bring the hon. Lady's remarks on the trades fair support scheme to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. However, the Government are attempting to find more effective ways in which to support our export effort, and we have certainly not ceased to do so.

On a building societies Bill, it has always been our hope that—following the publication of a draft, further consultation and the publication of another draft Bill—we might be able to make progress in this Session. I certainly do not rule that out, and I will bear in mind the hon. Lady's remarks.

Although the hon. Lady practically made a speech on transport that could have been made in a transport debate—which I think would have many attractions—she, perhaps rather unusually, got her facts wrong. She said that drivers had been sacked. However, it was a voluntary redundancy scheme, which is something quite different.

On the hon. Lady's Eversholt point, one matter that she did not mention was that the rise in share prices in the intervening period has been rather more. The rise in the *Financial Times* index over the relevant period has been slightly more than the rise in the price of the firm.

As for the NHS debate, I have never known my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to be less than well and fully briefed. I am quite sure that he will be able to dispose of any question that she or any other hon. Member would like to ask him.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 135?

[*That this House, believing that airline passengers, United Kingdom trade and the British aviation industry can only benefit from an expansion of services from United Kingdom airports where demand already exists, particularly regional airports such as Manchester, requests the Secretary of State for Transport to take every opportunity to liberalise access for airlines wishing to serve these airports, so that regional travellers can use their own airports wherever possible to the benefit of economic development in those areas and slots can be freed at London's airports for services which will enhance one of the world's largest hubs; and particularly urges the Secretary of State to pursue this policy during the forthcoming talks with the Singapore Government so that both United Kingdom and Singapore carriers can operate between their two countries and beyond without predetermined restrictions in order to meet growing demand in timely fashion.*]

The all-party early-day motion is about the liberalisation of air transport services between the United Kingdom and Singapore, and has been signed by 125 hon. Members. Negotiations between the United Kingdom and Singapore have now been going on for 15 months, without any progress being made, and the next round is due to start on 3 March. May I ask my right hon. Friend to draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport—who is next to him on the Treasury Bench—the importance of that early-day motion, and to ask him to do all that he can to resolve the matter in the forthcoming talks? May we also have a debate on the issue, so that those of us who feel strongly about it can have a chance to express our views?

Mr. Newton: As my hon. Friend will have noted by his glance, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has taken direct delivery of the point and I shall therefore have no need to pass it on to him. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will consider it.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): In addition to a repeated bid for the annual debate on the policing of London, may I ask the Leader of the House in all seriousness for a debate in Government time on what we can do to bring people such as the killers of Stephen Lawrence to justice? There has been an inquest and a finding of unlawful killing; the *Daily Mail* alleged on its front page that five young men are murderers; clearly, someone knows what happened; the juries acquitted not on a substantive hearing but on a technicality; and there might even be consensus in the House on speedy legislation to allow the people involved to be tried again substantively if the evidence permitted. Please can we do something, because it seems to whole sectors of the community, not just the black community, that justice is not being done?

Mr. Newton: First, I note the hon. Gentleman's renewed request for what has become an annual debate on the policing of London, which I shall continue to bear in mind. As for the unhappy case of Stephen Lawrence's death, I do not think that I can add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said on Tuesday, but I am sure that both he and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will look very carefully at the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on the value of libraries in the educational and cultural life of our children and in the continuing education and cultural life of all adults, so that I might bring to the House's attention the great value of Pitshanger library and libraries in Perivale, Hanwell, Greenford, Northolt and other parts of my constituency which are threatened by Ealing Labour council with either closure or serious cuts in services? Such cuts would be to the great detriment of the life of the community that I have the honour to represent, and they should be resisted.

Mr. Newton: Listening to my hon. Friend fairly regularly on these occasions, I have come to the conclusion that there is no limit to the iniquities of Ealing borough council. I and the whole Government, not least my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, certainly share my hon. Friend's view about the importance of libraries. He will be aware that the Government have published a document on the matter this very week.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East) *rose—*

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Faulds: I am so grateful for that warm welcome—again, please. Madam Speaker, may I inform you in privacy that my wife and I this morning had only very slight hangovers and we are most grateful to you?

May I be less demanding of the Leader of the House this week than I was last week? Is he not well aware, as the people who are concerned about foreign affairs in this House are, that there are increasing dangers to peace in Turkey, in Greece, in Albania, in Kosovo and in Cyprus and it really is essential that these matters are debated before the House is prorogued, because there are real dangers to peace in that part of the world?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman put this point to me last week, and I do not remember exactly what I said;

[Mr. Newton]

perhaps he might take it as having been said again, but I do not in any way dismiss the importance of the point to which he has adverted again. He will be aware, for example, that the Foreign Secretary's visit to Cyprus shortly before Christmas very much reflected our commitment to achieving a solution to the Cyprus problem.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 545 on asylum seekers, which has so far attracted 40 signatures from all parts of the House?

[*That this House welcomes the decision of the Court of Appeal on 17th February, which notes the special circumstances which make asylum seekers eligible for food and shelter under the National Assistance Act 1948; and calls on the Government to accept the Court's decision, fully compensate local authorities for the costs involved in discharging their duties to asylum seekers under the Act and work constructively with these authorities to ensure that an adequate and consistent level of support is provided to enable them to live decently while pursuing their applications.*]

Is there not a need for an early debate, following the Court of Appeal's decision on 17 February, so that we can ensure that local authorities such as mine in Hillingdon do not have to bear asylum seekers' accommodation and subsistence costs? Should that not be a national responsibility, shared equally by all the citizens of this country?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government are seeking leave to appeal to the House of Lords on that case. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to say a great deal. Manifestly, that seeking of leave to appeal shows that the Government do not accept that the provisions of the National Assistance Act 1948 apply to adult asylum seekers who are not elderly, infirm or disabled and have no need for community care services. We shall pursue that case.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): May we have a debate as early as possible on tax exiles? I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 546.

[*That this House welcomes the undertaking given by the multi-millionaire Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber that he will quit Britain should Labour win the General Election; believes such a promise provides an extra incentive to vote Labour; and looks forward to Sir Andrew keeping his promise.*]

I tabled that early-day motion based on a newspaper story that said that Sir Andrew intended to quit this country if Labour won the general election. I have now received a statement from him saying that he is deeply committed to this country, has never been resident abroad and would never leave Britain unless forced to do so by punitive taxation. As there is as little chance of a Labour Government introducing punitive taxation as there is of my writing a hit musical, Sir Andrew will clearly be staying in this country. He is a great composer and an English gentleman, who will be able to enjoy the fruits of his labour under a Labour Government.

Mr. Newton: If there was not punitive taxation under a Labour Government—happily, I do not expect one—it would be the first Labour Government in history under which there was not. I look forward to a Conservative Government and to attending the hon. Gentleman's musical.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): May I follow the question of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who I note is no longer here? It would be wrong to try to change the idea of double jeopardy, but in memory of Stephen Lawrence it might be a good idea to have a debate on encouraging more parents to bring up their children in the way in which Doreen and Neville Lawrence brought up Stephen, Stuart and Georgina. We ought to draw attention to the way in which parents bring up the children who carry knives, stay in groups that take part in murderous attacks and create a wall of silence to deny the family of the murder victim and the rest of us knowledge of what happened that night.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is right to comment on the importance of the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). He is also right to underline the fact that these problems cannot be solved by a stroke of the pen or a single Act of Parliament.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to a children's computer game that will shortly be released on the market? The game simulates driving a car that mounts the kerb and kills people. The more people the child kills and the older those people are, the more points the child gets. Will the right hon. Gentleman draw this to the attention of the Home Office and get the computer game banned at once?

Mr. Newton: The answer to that question is unequivocally yes. From the account that the hon. Gentleman has given—I am reliant on that account—I hope that those concerned with the game might think again.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate next week on the local government settlement and the level of council tax being budgeted for by Essex county council, which wants to make cuts in the fire service, cuts in education, cuts in the library service and cuts in other essential services? Those cuts are not necessary, because of the high level of reserves on which the council is sitting.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will remember that it is not long since we had a debate on Essex fire services and related matters, in which he took part. As a fellow Essex Member of Parliament, I understand and share his concerns, not least about some of Essex county council's proposals for school transport.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Will the Leader of the House ensure that Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party are allocated the supply day due to us? A previous debate was lost because of a mistake by others. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that that practice does not continue and become blatant discrimination against Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party? If the normal channels are blocked, will he unblock them?

Mr. Newton: I know of no blockage in the usual channels. We have provided one Opposition day for the minority parties. I am aware that they are likely to be due another. I bear his point in mind. The hon. Gentleman will also know that, under the conventions of the House, it is for the Leader of the Liberal Democrats to decide how the minority party days are allocated.

Sir James Hill (Southampton, Test): I expect that my right hon. Friend has noticed early-day motion 378.

[*That this House welcomes the joint appeal by the church councils of both parts of the Sudan entitled 'Here We Stand United in Action for Peace' noting particularly their appeal for international help to oversee a cease-fire and a referendum; and encourages the Foreign Secretary to respond positively.*]

The motion expresses the concern of the Church councils on what can only be called the genocide in southern Sudan. Is it possible, through the United Nations, to initiate a peace movement, more humanitarian aid and perhaps even an investigation by the Security Council of the United Nations on how to stop that dreadful warfare?

Mr. Newton: As my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office explained to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) last November, it is certainly our view that the Sudan needs constitutional arrangements that are acceptable to people in all parts of the country. The British Government wish to do everything that they can to bring that about. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will look carefully at my hon. Friend's proposal.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Now that all British Rail services, both passenger and freight, have been either sold or franchised, doubts have arisen in railway constituencies such as mine about the future of British Rail itself. More than 60 former employees of British Rail Engineering Ltd. carriageworks in York have died from asbestos-related diseases, and their widows have submitted claims for compensation to British Rail. I want to know, and those widows need to know, who will pay compensation in future if British Rail ceases to exist. Can the Leader of the House answer that question? If not, may we have a debate so that the Minister responsible can make a statement to the House?

Mr. Newton: It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that I am not in a position to give an immediate answer to his question. I see that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has temporarily left the Chamber, but I shall bring the question to his attention, and I am sure that he will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a debate on the future of the Tote? If such a debate were to take place, would my right hon. Friend like to speculate on the odds-on favourite to speak for the Opposition—the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) or the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)?

Mr. Newton: As I am a cautious man, I will not bet on which one of those three it would be.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): During last Monday's debate on BSE, one serious question remained unanswered; it involved the storage and disposal of BSE waste. Given that only 4 per cent. of the waste has so far been incinerated, may we have a statement next week on the storage, transport and disposal of BSE waste, to meet the urgent concerns of many neighbourhoods?

Mr. Newton: In the wake of this week's debate, I cannot promise a statement next week, but I shall bring the point to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): The Leader of the House will of course know that the assessors will be revisiting the wreck of MV Derbyshire in the next few days, and will probably be there for about 40 days or more. Will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that as much information as possible will be given to the Derbyshire Families Association about the return of the assessors to this country, and that the assessors' findings will be made widely available to the media and the rest of the country?

Mr. Newton: It is a pity that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has been unable to stay throughout these exchanges, but I am sure that he will study this one. I hope that the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge that my right hon. Friend and I have done everything that we can to be helpful to him in recent years over his concerns. I am sure that that approach will continue.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 497?

[*That this House notes with concern the Amnesty International Urgent Action Bulletin of 7th February that the conditions of detention of Ms R. McAliskey may amount to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment; notes the conditions of detention of the pregnant Ms McAliskey have led to a deterioration in her physical and psychological health and gives cause for concern; notes with despair the proposal that, if still in custody at the time of her confinement, she will not be able to use the mother and baby unit at Holloway Prison if it is being used by other prisoners; supports Amnesty International's view that the possible decision to separate mother and child would damage permanently the mother-child bonding relationship; supports the view that if the extradition application is successful, the child should, if the mother so desires, accompany her to Germany; calls upon the Government to review urgently the conditions under which all Category A prisoners, whether convicted or on remand are held; remembering that no matter how grievous the crime for which they have been convicted or the charges which are levelled against them, their human rights too have to be respected and treated with dignity; and believes that it is a measure of society's humanity how those who have offended or alleged to have offended against society are treated whilst held in custody.*]

It concerns the case of Roisin McAliskey, who is eight months pregnant and has been detained in Holloway since November. Many people have never understood why the extradition proceedings she faces could not have been brought in Northern Ireland, where she lives. There is

[Mr. Max Madden]

increasing concern that her continued detention and the state of her health represent a victory for personal and political vengeance over natural justice and compassion. Will the Leader of the House have urgent discussions with the Prime Minister, the Attorney-General and the Home Secretary to find a way to release this young woman from prison on bail—considerable sureties have been offered—or to transfer her to Northern Ireland, where she will at least be near her family and friends?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will have noted that the Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), is in her place and has heard what he has said. However, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary considers that the conditions under which category A prisoners are held are the minimum required to prevent their escape, and has no plans to change them significantly.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Leader of the House ask the Defence Secretary or the Foreign Secretary to make a statement about NATO expansionist policies in eastern and central Europe, particularly after the Albright visit, because hon. Members of all political persuasions are worried about what is happening? Many of us believe that world peace is being threatened by people who do not understand what they are doing.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns will be noted, but I am not in a position to promise either a statement or a debate at this time.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Does the Leader of the House recall that some weeks ago I raised the delicate subject of Mohammed Al Fayed appearing before 1 million people on television, waving envelopes of money that he claimed explicitly were asked for and given to Members of Parliament? There was a significant statement from you, Madam Speaker, on the subject. I realise that it is difficult and that lawyers are involved, but is there any likelihood of the matter being brought to a head, so that the good name of Parliament can be maintained?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, you, Madam Speaker, made an important statement following his previous raising of the matter. However, particularly bearing in mind my position as Chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and some of the matters that are with the Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards, I cannot add much to what you said, Madam Speaker, or comment beyond what I said previously.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we have a debate on the deteriorating quality of parliamentary answers, including the one I received yesterday from the Leader of the House, who said that he could not possibly inform me which were the most expensive answers to parliamentary questions for which calculations had already been made, yet the Library could tell me within about two minutes?

In 1989 I tabled a question asking Baroness Thatcher to list the failures of her reign as Prime Minister. The answer was disappointingly brief and probably cost about 30p. However, a pursuant answer from the former hon. Member for Pembroke filled 23 columns of *Hansard* and cost £4,500. How can the Government persist with the excuse of disproportionate cost, and why is it beyond the wit or ability of the Minister's Department to provide me with the other nine most expensive answers which I am sure were given to other Conservative Members?

Mr. Newton: If I remember rightly, because I looked carefully at the question—I rewrote the answer myself and must therefore take complete responsibility for any deficiencies in it—the hon. Gentleman was asking for information over a 12-year period. I think that he underestimated the sheer practical problems of doing what he wanted.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 504 in my name?

[That this House regrets the waste of taxpayers' money involved in the Child Support Agency advertising campaign throughout the Greater Manchester area; notes that on 12th February the Advertising Standards Authority published a report stating that the claim made in one advertisement 'Dear Parent, Even after you pay maintenance you will always have more income if you are in work' was not an acceptable claim and that the advertisers have been asked not to use the claim again; notes further that the report made by the Advertising Standards Authority is a carefully considered decision following a reconsideration of their original decision; and therefore calls upon the Government to refrain from publishing any further inaccurate advertisements relating to the Child Support Agency and instead to start using taxpayers' money for a much needed nationwide advertising campaign directed at encouraging the take-up of income-related benefits amongst pensioners.]

There has been a misleading campaign by the Child Support Agency in the Greater Manchester area. As the Advertising Standards Authority has asked the CSA not to repeat the claim, may we have an urgent debate on the matter?

Mr. Newton: The answer to the latter point is no. As the hon. Lady is obviously aware, the Advertising Standards Authority report is the subject of an appeal by the Department of Social Security, which takes the view that the report failed to recognise the way in which the benefits system operates.

BILL PRESENTED

European Communities (Amendment)

Mr. Tony Benn, supported by Mr. Peter Shore, Sir Teddy Taylor, Ms Mildred Gordon, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Dennis Skinner and Mrs. Teresa Gorman, presented a Bill to amend sections 2 and 3 of the European Communities Act 1972 to return full and unfettered powers to the United Kingdom Parliament over all legislation enacted by the European Communities which has had, has or would otherwise have legal effect in the United Kingdom: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 112].

The Constitution

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Knapman.*]

Madam Speaker: Because of the large number of hon. Members who wish to speak, I have had to limit speeches—other than those from Front Benchers, of course—to 10 minutes throughout the debate.

3.59 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): Last summer, the other place had a two-day debate on the constitution. It was a worthwhile and constructive occasion, and I hope that today will prove to be so as well.

We have no written constitution in this country—it evolves. It has changed in this Parliament, and it will change in the future. I agreed with the leader of the Labour party, when he said last week:

"The idea that the British constitution should never change and evolve and develop is completely absurd."

I entirely agree with that—of course it is right—and I made precisely the same point myself when speaking in Wales. The point is not whether our constitution should change, but how it should change and at what pace it should change.

We have given a new role to the Welsh and Scottish Grand Committees; we have devolved powers to schools and hospitals; and we have reformed procedures in this House and increased Government accountability to Select Committees. I am in favour of more change. We have agreed to set up a Northern Ireland Grand Committee similar to those for Scotland and Wales.

I favour further reform of the procedures in this House. We have set out our proposals to ensure that new legislation is better considered, with a two-year parliamentary programme and more draft legislation for consultation. As the two Houses are complementary, I see a case for similar examination of the other place. We will continue the process of improving public services, because we wish to give people more choice and opportunity.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: I want to make progress—I shall give way a little later.

All that change has been gradual; it is sensible, and it has been thought through before it has been produced. We on this side of the House have always advocated a Europe of nations. Labour's plans would undermine the strength of the nation state. Like many on the continent, Labour seems to be advocating a Europe of the regions, but England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are not regions—they are four nations within a united kingdom. A Europe of the regions would be the sure way to enable a bureaucracy to bypass national Governments. It is the wrong way forward, and it is not for us.

That is only one reason—it is by no means the principal reason—why I do not favour a tax-raising parliament for Scotland.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman will let me make a little progress, I undertake to give way later.

Mr. Benn: It is on the European question.

The Prime Minister: Oh, all right.

Mr. Benn: May I ask the First Lord of the Treasury, in that capacity, what democratic justification there could be, in principle, for handing over his powers on public expenditure, taxation and interest rates to a central bank in Frankfurt, so that the responsibility that he now exercises—accountable to Parliament and the people—would no longer be exercised through the ballot box? Has he read the book of Genesis and of how Esau handed over his birthright for a mess of pottage, and has been remembered ever since as having made the biggest mistake of his life?

The Prime Minister: I have, but I am not sure that I would draw a direct relationship between that story and the treaty of Rome, although the right hon. Gentleman might do so. There was a pained expression on the faces of the Labour Front Benchers as he asked his question. As he knows, if we had not obtained the opt-out that I obtained at Maastricht, we in this House would not have the option to make at some stage in the future the decision that the right hon. Gentleman wishes us to make.

Let me return to saying what I was about to turn to. I do not favour a tax-raising parliament for Scotland, or a toothless Welsh Assembly, or 10 regional assemblies, taking powers either from this House or from local government or from both—it is uncertain where they would come from. Nor do I favour unpicking the House of Lords, changing the voting system and ceding further powers from this House to Europe.

The Labour party has given in to the temptation to put party before country. *[Interruption.]* There is no nice way of expressing that, nor does there deserve to be. The plans drawn up by the Labour party, with the Liberal Democrats in tow, are a blueprint that would undermine the unity of the United Kingdom and erode the authority of this Parliament. As they stand, any Member of this House should be ashamed to endorse them.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): A moment ago, the Prime Minister recognised the nationality of Wales and Scotland, but the provisions that he suggested might be available for changing the government of those two countries were all encapsulated within this institution in London. Does that mean that, if the Conservative Government are elected to power, for however long they are in office, there will in effect be an English veto on any aspirations of Wales and Scotland to national autonomy, and that the only alternatives for Wales and Scotland are the status quo or full self-government?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the last time the people of Wales had the opportunity to

[The Prime Minister]

choose, they chose by a majority of four to one not to have devolution, but to remain part of the United Kingdom.

The plan to set up an income-tax-raising parliament in Scotland, partly elected by proportional representation, on the bogus mandate of a referendum with two questions, before the legislation has even been considered, is deeply flawed. So is the plan to have an assembly in Wales without tax-raising powers, and a pre-legislative referendum with one question.

In essence, it is proposed that Parliament would be presented with what is little more than a public opinion poll and told to endorse it, however absurd examination of the subsequent proposals showed them to be; and if this Parliament exercised its constitutional right and radically changed the legislation, as well it might, there is no plan in the minds of the Labour party or the Liberal party for a subsequent referendum to discover whether that change would be acceptable. I believe that this is an abuse of the way in which constitutional change should be approached.

Mr. Tony Banks: A moment ago, the Prime Minister talked about putting party before country. Is he not doing precisely that by keeping the whole country guessing about the date of the next general election? Is not that all about putting party before country? Does he not find it outrageous that one person should have the power to decide when the rest of the country will be allowed to vote? Would he support fixed-term Parliaments?

The Prime Minister: A straight answer to the hon. Gentleman is no, and I will waste no more time on him.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will give way a little later, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

We have in the House constitutional parties that favour separatism—an independent Scotland and an independent Wales. Devolution plans, for them at least—and for others—cloak separatist ambitions. The Labour and Liberal parties may well believe that they are buying off the separatists. I believe that they are selling out to the separatists. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Let me now consider their plans for Scotland.

Of the 129 members of a Scottish Parliament—

Mr. Maxton *rose—*

The Prime Minister: Just a minute. Of its 129 members—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: Of its 129 members, 56 would be placemen, drawn from lists approved by party leaders, with no accountability to constituents or responsibility for them. There would be gender quotas—a politically correct idea, which many people would find patronising.

There will be no revising chamber—no second chamber. The House of Lords would not be permitted to scrutinise Scottish legislation; neither would anything replace it. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased to see Labour Members hoot. Nor would anything replace it. Five million British subjects, on the threshold of a new millennium, would be brought under unicameral Government—the object of suspicion to every democrat for centuries. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] That is what they propose. No checks; no balances—that is the plan, and it is a complete rag-bag.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I am sorry. I give way to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton).

Mr. Maxton: As the Prime Minister is talking about devolution, will he explain why he is prepared to devolve power to Northern Ireland but not to Scotland and Wales?

The Prime Minister: I shall come directly and in detail to Northern Ireland, to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. It is—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] It is a fair point, and I will discuss it in detail.

If I may return for a moment to Scotland, the other question unanswered is whether, in any legislation, there is to be Royal Assent. I am not sure, and I hope that it can be made clear.

Then, of course, there is the—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why should there be?"] I did not hear what was said; perhaps it was not worth hearing. Then there is the West Lothian question.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I wish to make a little progress, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

Mr. Home Robertson: What about the East Lothian question?

The Prime Minister: West Lothian is more logical that East Lothian. I shall deal with West Lothian.

The Labour leader has the opportunity to make history today: he can answer the West Lothian question. How could Scottish Members of Parliament in this House continue to legislate on matters in England, if English Members had no control over the same matters in Scotland? I hope that we will get an answer.

More insanely than that, those Scottish Members of Parliament voting on, say, health and education, and law and order, in England would not be able to vote on the same issues affecting their own constituents, because that would be the privilege of the Scottish Parliament.

Let me illustrate the point more clearly. The shadow Chancellor, who, alas, is not here this afternoon, would not be able to vote on health, education or other important matters relating to his constituents in Dunfermline, but he could get stuck into Dagenham or anywhere else in England, closing down grammar schools, abolishing GP fundholding practices and all the other regressive nonsenses that Labour supports. I do not understand how anyone can defend such unconstitutional nonsense.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Prime Minister: In a moment. I shall finish this passage, and then give way first to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel).

We have long known that those difficulties exist. The Labour leader himself has honestly admitted that "the anomaly is there" and said that the answer to the West Lothian question is—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Mr. Campbell-Savours, I am sick and tired of hearing you shout out from a sedentary position—*[Interruption.]* Order. There was a great deal of pressure last Thursday on the Leader of the House to bring the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to the Dispatch Box today for this important debate. I want to hear the debate in silence. I call the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Let me, Madam Speaker—

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I want to ask the Prime Minister a question.

The Prime Minister: I think that we have heard enough from the hon. Gentleman for the moment.

Let me repeat what hon. Members may not have heard. The Labour leader has honestly admitted that "the anomaly is there", and said that the answer to the West Lothian question

"is the answer we've always given".

But what is that answer that he has "always given"? And where is it? It is as elusive as the Loch Ness monster. Has anyone seen it—or heard it? Will we hear what it is today?

Then, of course, there is the position of Scottish Members of Parliament who might be appointed as Ministers at Westminster. Will the leader of the Labour party confirm the statement of the shadow Foreign Secretary who, when responsible for health, said:

"Once we have a Scottish Parliament handling health affairs, it is not possible for me to continue as Health Minister administering health in England"?

The same principle would apply to education, the legal system, local government, home affairs and so on.

Since the 19th century, all devolution schemes have foundered on the question whether to withdraw voting rights from Westminster Members of Parliament representing nations with devolved Parliaments, or whether to reduce their number. The Liberal Democrats, to their credit, recognise that. They are already advocating a cut from 72 to 60 Scottish Members. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) does

"not believe it will be possible to get a devolution Bill through Parliament without a reduction in the number of Scottish MPs to 57 or less."

The Labour leader has said:

"of course there are consequences in what we plan; we don't ignore them."

So what are those consequences, and what does he plan?

At present, Scotland has more Members of Parliament than a strict justification on grounds of population would produce. The Labour Opposition wish to keep them in Parliament, because, without them, they would have a diminished chance of a UK majority. So, in their party interest, they are prepared to gerrymander the electoral system. The powerful office of Secretary of State for Scotland would also be abolished, lessening the voice of Scotland in the House and in Whitehall.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I recognise that the Prime Minister believes strongly and genuinely that creating any devolved Parliament could lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. I hope that he would respect the reverse view, which is that, without devolution, we risk the break-up of the United Kingdom. No anomaly that he has so far mentioned is as great as the present one, where 580 non-Scottish Members of Parliament determine purely Scottish legislation, such as the poll tax, which we had in Scotland before it was introduced in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman referred to the poll tax and the grievance that it was introduced in Scotland first. The tartan tax is to be introduced in Scotland only.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I wonder whether the Prime Minister had time to look at a survey published in *The Scotsman* on Monday, which showed that three quarters of Scots believe that the Tories are an English-based party with little relevance to Scotland. That included a third of Tory voters, although that was admittedly a small sample. After almost seven years of his prime ministership, why do so many Scots believe that he leads an anti-Scottish party? Might it be something to do with his implacable hostility to legitimate Scottish aspirations?

The Prime Minister: I know that the hon. Gentleman would wish to peddle that line, but if he looked at what has happened to the quality of life in Scotland during the 18 years of Conservative Government, he would see the extent to which it has improved. If he looks at the growth of employment prospects, he will see the extent to which they have improved. If he sees the improvement in the education system or the health system, that has happened under Conservative Government during the past 18 years. If he were totally frank, he would acknowledge that that was the case.

I come to the point led into by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale—the infamous tartan tax. Why should people in Scotland pay income tax at a starting rate 15 per cent. higher than in England, Wales and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Or lower.

The Prime Minister: Or lower? The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) clearly thinks that the extra public expenditure voted by the House to Scotland per head of population would continue, so that the Scottish Parliament could offer lower taxes to the people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. He knows that that is unreal.

The Labour party has just put up posters giving a five-year pledge by the Labour leader not to put up income tax rates. However, Labour would put them up in Scotland, where it is pledged to establish a tartan income-tax-raising Parliament within a year, which would put up tax rates. That is a little insensitive of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield. The Islington elite clearly forgot about Scotland, and certainly forgot about the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), although I suppose that that is part of the Labour constitution. The hon. Gentleman should move to Islington.

[The Prime Minister]

Perhaps today the Labour leader will clarify the situation: income tax up in Scotland or not? If he has no plans to raise tax, why shackle his party to a policy that enables tax to be raised? What would the tartan tax do to jobs, investment and pensioners' savings in Scotland?

An increase of 3p in the basic rate of tax would leave someone on average earnings in Scotland £6 a week worse off. For a married couple who both worked, it could be double that. It would cost families £300 with one person in employment, and perhaps as much as £600 with two people working. Scottish pensioners who saved all their lives or contributed to pension plans would be worse off, just because they live in Scotland.

If that injustice goes ahead in Scotland, how would it work? How much would it cost? Would not the Inland Revenue have to set up a separate tax regime for Scotland? Does not a separate tax regime acknowledge the blatantly separatist implications of Labour's plans for a different tax system? Separate tax regimes define separate nations.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I am not the only one who thinks so. As another critic said:

"The moment powers to raise taxation are offered and taken . . . the fracture of the United Kingdom will have begun."

They are not my words—although I agree with them—but those of Mr. Neil Kinnock when he was a Member of Parliament. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Workington has shouted at me from a seated position often enough over the years, so he can stay seated today.

Would the tartan tax be levied according to where people live, where they work, or where their company is located? Could it become the tweed tax, spreading across the border? If someone from Islington was employed by a Scottish company, would he pay the tartan tax?

I shall give the right hon. Gentleman a practical example to chew on and respond to. Take the case of an important Scottish company, Kwik-Fit. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to listen, as he may wish to respond to this point. I am sure that the conversation of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) is diverting, but he can talk to her later. Kwik-Fit has 4,000 employees in England and 1,200 in Scotland, but all are paid from the payroll in Edinburgh. Would they all pay the tartan tax, or would Kwik-Fit be expected to apply different tax rates to different employees? *[Interruption.]*

When Labour Members do not like it because they do not have the answers, they try to drown it out. I repeat: would Kwik-Fit be expected to apply different tax rates to different employees? If not, employees in England would pay the tartan tax. If they did not, they would face a tax rise if they were transferred to their head office in Scotland. What would that do to the competitiveness of an extremely successful Scottish company? Opposition Members have not thought about any of that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: We have.

Mr. Major: Good, then the Leader of the Opposition will give us the answers this afternoon.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: No, we want the organ grinder, not the monkey.

What of Scottish Members of Parliament who advocate the tartan tax? Would they not be exempt from paying that tax? Within three months, the people of Scotland and the rest of Britain will have to vote on those crazy proposals. They have a right to answers, and, if those answers are not forthcoming today, they will be entitled to draw their own conclusions.

If anything could be as much of a mess as Labour's plans for Scotland, it must be its plans for Wales. Wales is to have an assembly instead of a parliament.

Mr. Home Robertson *rose—*

Mr. Major: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, as I am now talking about Wales. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh".] Perhaps I shall give way in a minute.

What is it about the people of Wales that means that Labour would not trust them with the powers that it is prepared to give to the people of Scotland? When the shadow Welsh Secretary, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), talks of a Welsh assembly not having tax-raising powers, he adds "initially". He says that Labour's plans for Wales are "clear and becoming clearer". What is becoming clearer—

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the Prime Minister to refuse to give way to a Scottish Member of Parliament who wishes to ask a question about Wales, when the Prime Minister is arguing about the United Kingdom?

Madam Speaker: It is entirely up to the right hon. Gentleman to develop his speech in his own way. Perhaps the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) will be called to speak later in the debate.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for East Lothian knows that I have given way often enough in my speech, and shall do so again.

The shadow Welsh Secretary talks about a Welsh Assembly not having tax-raising powers initially. However, it is becoming clearer to the people of Wales that, in due course, they too will have to pay higher taxes for the privilege of living in Wales. I shall tell hon. Members why, and I quote:

"No level of Government has been denied some control of revenue raising . . . indeed, the lack of such a power and the conflict this could provoke is a more significant danger than having it".

In essence, not having a tax-raising power is more dangerous than having a tax-raising power. That is not my view, but the view of the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). If the Labour leader does not repudiate that view, we know the fate for Wales—increased taxation.

Plans such as those mean that conflict between devolved Parliaments and the House would be inevitable. The outcome would be to damage the unity of the United Kingdom and lead to its fracture.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Why does the Prime Minister persist in his nonsense of claiming that the choice before the people over Wales is for or against a devolved assembly? The choice is whether we have a vote or not. The Government are offering Wales no choice and

no vote. That is what the people will decide in the general election. The Prime Minister is trying to stop Wales having a choice on devolution.

The Prime Minister: Wales had a choice and expressed its view very clearly in the past.

Let me now move to what is proposed for England. A parliament for Scotland—*[Interruption.]* An assembly for Wales—*[Interruption.]*. The more Opposition Members shout, the less they have the answers to the questions that I have put. There is a lot of sound and fury. We will see whether we get the answers. Then there are to be new assemblies for the regions of England.

Where is the appetite for a whole extra tier of government?

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Ask the people.

The Prime Minister: "Ask the people," says the hon. Gentleman. I bet that they would be very pleased with more bureaucrats, more politicians, more taxes.

Labour say that they will set up regional assemblies

"if that is what local people want"

Presumably that means yet more referendums.

Mr. Tony Banks: What is wrong with that?

The Prime Minister: The Labour leader says that he is not in favour of referendums—that is one thing that is wrong with it. I suppose that the hon. Gentleman shares very few views with his leader, so it is unsurprising that he does not share that one.

If some regions choose to have an assembly, what will happen in those regions that do not? What would the assemblies do? The shadow Environment Secretary is very vague about that. He says that they will have "a say" over health. What that means, heaven alone knows. He is not certain, but just possibly he might want them to monitor water and electricity companies. He goes on to say that their demand for "more services" would be "unstoppable". What services? What nonsense! He has not the faintest idea what they are going to do.

The real reason for establishing regional assemblies across England has nothing whatever to do with good government in England; rather it has to do with giving the Labour party a spurious justification for keeping the present number of Scottish and Welsh Members of Parliament in the House, even after establishing a parliament in Edinburgh and an assembly in Cardiff. That chaos—more government, more regulation—is the price that England would be asked to pay as the Labour party tries to appease separatism and tilt the electoral system in its favour.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Has the Prime Minister not noticed that the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee pointed out that the people of England have £17 billion of public expenditure per annum spent by his placemen and women through quangos, and the regions and the people living in the regions have no say in what the quangos are doing?

The Prime Minister: If that is a new Liberal policy to abolish them all, I am very interested to hear it. No doubt they want to set up whole new elected tiers of bureaucracy. I note very carefully what the hon. Gentleman asks.

Let me turn to the point originally raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) about Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland remains one area where the Opposition parties have constantly supported Government efforts, and that has given the peace process added strength. I have publicly thanked them for that often enough, and I willingly do so again today. Unfortunately, some of them attempt to use the special circumstances of Northern Ireland to promote other views.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we can contemplate an assembly for Northern Ireland but not for Scotland and Wales. *[Interruption.]* It is a fair question, and if Opposition Members will listen, I will give them a detailed answer. The best answer is that given by the shadow Scottish Secretary, who said:

"We would be unwise to draw a parallel between Scotland's . . . desire to have a parliament and anything going on in Northern Ireland."

I shall elaborate the point. He is right, because the circumstances are not comparable. That is only the background to why the hon. Gentleman made that statement.

What we have suggested for Northern Ireland is radically different from the plan that the Labour party has for Scotland and Wales. There is no suggestion of an assembly with tax-raising powers. There are no pluralist politics in Northern Ireland, as there are in Scotland and Wales. There is no representation by parties likely to form a United Kingdom Government. What we are seeking in Northern Ireland is a widely accepted accommodation based on consent. That would provide the surest possible foundation for maintaining Northern Ireland's place firmly within the United Kingdom. That is our wish. Labour's flawed proposals for Scotland and Wales would ultimately drive them out of the United Kingdom, and we oppose that.

Labour also proposes to fiddle with the House of Lords, despite the fact—

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*—

Mr. Donohoe *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I shall not give way to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) until he has learnt better manners. I shall give way to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe).

Mr. Donohoe: Will the Prime Minister's proposals for Northern Ireland lead to a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament in the House?

The Prime Minister: When Northern Ireland had an assembly in the past, it had 12 Members of Parliament and constituency sizes were about 50 per cent. larger than constituency sizes across the rest of the United Kingdom. There is already over-representation in Scotland: there are 72 Scottish Members, as against 17 for Northern Ireland. Its powers were not comparable with the powers that would go to a Scottish Parliament.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the Prime Minister agree with me that, if Northern Ireland had

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

proper representation in the House, comparable to that for Scotland, we would have 23 Members of Parliament? Does he further accept that the plan is to return devolved local administration with powers to Northern Ireland? Does he also accept that the signing over of certain consultative positions to the Dublin Government is an anomaly in a kingdom that expects to rule itself?

As a graduate of Trinity college, I would have understood if the Government were guiding the appointment of a person to the senate of Trinity, but why, in the name of all that is wonderful, do we have to consult in quangoland on appointments to the senate of Queen's university, the numbers of which must be sent to Dublin?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right about the comparable number of Members of Parliament. Indeed, there would be rather more English Members of Parliament on a comparable basis were we to have the same population representation as Scotland. As I said a few moments ago, we are seeking to provide the surest foundation for maintaining Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom. That will remain our constant policy.

The Labour party also proposes to fiddle with the House of Lords, despite the fact that it works well as a revising chamber and as a forum for debate. There are times when we hear a little less from Labour Members about the House of Lords, such as last week, when they used it to undermine our plans to get tough on drug dealers, violent criminals and burglars. The House of Lords is all right then. What the shadow Home Secretary will not do in this House, he has his colleagues do in the other House if he possibly can. When the House of Lords so misbehaves itself that it agrees with the Government, Labour says that it is a bastion of unacceptable privilege.

Labour proposes to change the House of Lords in a two-stage reform. First, it would remove the right of hereditary peers to sit. For stage two, with characteristic firmness of purpose, it undertakes to work it all out later. Labour risks creating the largest and most powerful quango in history, to pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). It would be a House filled with hand-picked appointments, which would give a whole new meaning to the term "trade union barons": an Islington focus group writ large. If those people are not to be appointed, will they be elected? If so, would the Upper House set itself up in opposition to this House? Who would arbitrate between them? Indeed:

"The prospect of a second Chamber challenging or replicating the power of the first would produce instability and inefficiency, and is to be avoided."

That is my view, but that is also how the Labour party put it in its document. So it admits the dangers, but it still proposes the change.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Prime Minister has already referred to a revising Chamber two or three times, saying, for instance, that one would not be available in Scotland under Labour's plans. Is he happy with the fact that, on Tuesday, this House reversed the decisions of the House of Lords on every amendment?

The Prime Minister: This House is sovereign. It is because the hon. Gentleman does not believe that that he follows the politics he does, but I do believe that this House is sovereign.

The final lunacy in Labour's plans is, of course, reform of the voting system. The Liberal Democrats have long favoured that, for reasons that I well understand. It is true that the "first past the post" system does them no favours, but I think that it is right for the country. Proportional representation would deliver permanent coalitions, for ever depending on back-room deals with minority parties that would withdraw support whenever it suited them. [*Laughter.*] It is interesting to see that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) knows that that is true.

Labour's view, however, is very murky. We are told that Labour flirts with the idea of a referendum on proportional representation—one of the dozen or so referendums that it now plans in order to keep the Liberal Democrats happy. But, at the same time, the Labour leader uses his familiar tactic of sending people out into the Lobbies to whisper that he personally is opposed to PR. We know that he says one thing in public and another in private; now we see that he says different things in private whenever it suits him. Today, he can tell us his position in public.

We are told that constitutional reform would be a priority for a Labour Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that Labour Members confirm that. Constitutional reform would be a priority—not jobs, not taxes, not health, not law and order, but gerrymandering the constitution with these barmy propositions.

Our constitution is the foundation of our democracy. It is the base on which our freedoms appear, and our economic prosperity. That is why I defend it. I would change it only cautiously, and after careful examination. If the case were to be made, I would support it, but no case has yet remotely been made for the changes proposed by the Opposition.

The constitution should not be a political plaything for party gain. Ours is a united kingdom, a proud nation state, part of a Europe that is and should remain a partnership of nations and not a federal state. Labour's constitutional proposals would affect not just Scotland and Wales, but the whole United Kingdom. They would affect this Parliament. They would affect the way in which this nation is governed. The damage they would do is massive, and the benefits they would bring are dubious. They are rightly an election issue, and we shall make them so.

4.38 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): Judging by what we have just heard, this is the first Opposition day to be delivered to the Conservative party for nearly 18 years. We take it as something of a compliment that the Prime Minister should table a motion to debate our policy rather than his own. If I may say so, as an Opposition speech, the Prime Minister's speech was a classic of its kind; but, if the Prime Minister wants to make more such Opposition speeches, he should summon up a little courage and call a general election.

In his speech, as in several speeches of the same kind, the Prime Minister did not have one positive proposal to make. He asked a series of questions but never dealt with the issue of principle: is the status quo on our constitution satisfactory? In a further spasm of oppositionitis, he failed to answer this question. If what we are proposing is so wrong, why will he not commit his party to reversing it?

If a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly are notions so at odds with the British constitution, why does he not pledge himself to abolishing them? If hereditary peers are so justifiable and their abolition so perverse, why does he not pledge himself to reinstate them?

The phrase that was missing from the Prime Minister's speech was "a thousand years of history". We did some historical research and discovered that a thousand years ago, the leader of this country was one Ethelred the Unready. An historian commented at the time that the Government were weak, the country was in a state of unrest, there was trouble over Europe, and shortly afterwards we were invaded and spent the next 200 years speaking French.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose—*

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) *rose—*

Mr. Blair: This is indeed a feast of opportunities. I shall give way first to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood).

Mr. Redwood: Why was the right hon. Gentleman unready on Monday for his own debate, why did he run away from that debate, why did he lose it, and why did he make no comment afterwards?

Mr. Blair: If the right hon. Gentleman is to be a future candidate in the Tory leadership stakes, he will have to do rather better than that.

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Blair: I should like to make a little progress and then I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Of course 1,000 years has been not a period of constitutional paralysis but a period of massive constitutional development and change—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish".] Conservative Members say, "Rubbish," but I shall mention some of the changes. I know that the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) may wish to return to the days of Ethelred the Unready. Over the past 1,000 years there has been the Magna Carta; the first Parliament, the Union between England and Wales in the 16th century; the civil war; the glorious revolution; the Union with Scotland in the 18th century and the Union with Ireland in the 19th century. There was the 19th century reform Act which introduced better voting rights; universal suffrage and the Parliament Act 1949.

I remind the right hon. Member for Wokingham that, if the Prime Minister thinks that nothing has changed in the past 1,000 years, he should remember that it was under the Conservatives that we signed the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty. I do not know how much they wish to be reminded of that. It is not true either to say that they have not recently changed the constitution. The Conservative party changed it for the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). They changed it for him, but they will not change it in accordance with the wishes of the people of this country.

Let us be clear about that thousand years of change. The Tory party, when it existed, opposed most of the change. It was a Tory Prime Minister who in 1830, before the Reform Act 1832, said that the unreformed Parliament possessed the full and entire confidence of the country. It was a Tory Prime Minister who, in 1911, said that the House of Lords could not be improved on and that the idea of reforming it was the most dangerous one ever to be put before the country. It was the Tory party which, in the early part of this century, opposed women's suffrage. The Tory party has always wanted to hoard power in the hands of a small elite.

Mr. Marlow: We have had the knockabout; perhaps now we can have answers to some of the important questions. If there were to be a Scottish Parliament with powers in Scotland over health and education, would the right hon. Gentleman allow his Scottish Members of Parliament to vote on English health and education? If he cannot answer that question, all his devolution proposals have no credibility whatever.

Mr. Blair: I can answer it, and I will. I shall come to those issues in my speech, and the hon. Gentleman will get clear answers.

Apart from the flimsiest of fig leaves, the Prime Minister stands before us effectively as the candidate of no change. All is well. Keep it roughly as it is—1,000 years of history and change and then the end of history. Perfection is then reached and nothing more need be done. How bizarre a position when we think that, today, for many people outside the House, politics and our political system are probably less respected than they have been for generations. We have the most over-centralised Government in the western world.

Over the past few years, Parliament has been beset by allegations of sleaze and disreputable conduct, such that the Prime Minister had to set up two judicial inquiries—one into the conduct of Members of Parliament and the other into the conduct of Ministers. The House is probably held in lower regard than many of us would like, the system of holding Government to account is poor, and, after 28 pieces of local government legislation, it is a scandal that more money is spent by unelected, unaccountable quangos than by directly elected local government. This is happening less than three years before the start of the 21st century. By all means let us debate the detail of change, but we must answer the need for change in our country.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid–Sussex) *rose—*

Mr. Blair: I shall come to devolution and the House of Lords in a moment. I shall shortly give way to the right hon. Gentleman, and I ask him to sit down for a moment.

Before I deal with devolution and the House of Lords, I shall consider devolution in a small way, in London, and speak about the way that it is governed.

London is the only capital city of any comparably sized country in the western world without its own strategic authority. I say again that, by all means, let us debate what type of change there should be, but when we ask Londoners and look around London and see what the absence of proper strategic planning has done, can any of us doubt the need for a proper, strategic, co-ordinating authority?

I return to Scottish and Welsh devolution. We believe that decentralisation is right and proper. Indeed, there is an inconsistency in the Conservative attitude to that.

[Mr. Blair]

Conservatives say yes to subsidiarity in Europe but no to it in the UK. The Prime Minister reserved his loudest condemnation for devolution.

Mr. Renton: Is the right hon. Gentleman not in danger of adding to the contempt of Parliament to which he refers by his constant evasion, and that of the members of his shadow Cabinet, of the West Lothian question? I remind him that the question was first asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) 20 years ago. The hon. Gentleman sought an answer from the Labour party then at the same time as he published a book entitled "Devolution: the end of Britain?". Will the right hon. Gentleman give a specific, clear answer? For example, why should the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) be able to vote to abolish grant-maintained schools in my constituency when I shall not be able to vote on abolishing them in his?

Mr. Blair: As I have said, the Prime Minister reserved his loudest attack for devolution. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members want the answer to the question by the right hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Renton) and they are about to get it. May I have a little patience, please?

The protestations can be kept in proportion if we remind ourselves that, in the 1970s, the Conservatives proposed a Scottish Assembly, to be elected by proportional representation, with law-making and revenue-raising powers and with no reduction in the number of Scottish Members of Parliament. I am about to give the same answer that the Conservatives gave then, so the right hon. Gentleman can listen to it.

Let me remind the House of what was said in the Tory Scottish manifesto of 1974:

"Devolution is our policy and is the direct opposite of separatism. It can free Scotland from the frustrations of centralisation."

I say, "Hear, hear" to that. Who was it who declared at Edinburgh, at a rally of the Conservatives:

"The establishment of a Scottish Assembly must be a top priority to ensure that more decisions are taken in Scotland by Scots"?

It was one Margaret Thatcher, now Baroness Thatcher. Who was it who in the same year wrote passionately of the need of the Tory party to prepare itself for a future

"where a Scottish assembly is a permanent feature of political life, as it inevitably will be"?

It was the man who is now Secretary of State for Scotland. Who said that

"people had forgotten that it was the Tories who first developed the whole concept of a Scottish assembly . . . The party has an opportunity to recharge the batteries . . . and the proposed new Scottish assembly can be the catalyst"?

It was his predecessor, now the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: I shall in one moment. Let me just complete this, because I know the right hon. Gentleman would like the full list. Who was it who said in answer to the West Lothian question:

"We would strongly oppose any suggestion of bargaining Scottish representation at Westminster in order to obtain parliamentary approval to the Devolution Bill"?

It was the Foreign Secretary. Naturally, the Conservative party is entitled to change its mind, but let it no longer insult our intelligence and that of the British people by pretending that a policy that it used to espouse in virtually every detail means the end of civilisation as we know it.

Mr. Forsyth: The right hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct. The Conservative party in Scotland did advocate a Scottish Assembly in the 1970s, but it was because we could not answer the West Lothian question that we abandoned the policy.

He has still failed to answer the question: how could he justify to the House Scottish Members of Parliament coming down here in greater numbers than would be appropriate for England and voting on English business when they had no say on the same business in their constituency? It was because we could not answer that question that we abandoned the policy. The right hon. Gentleman should answer the question or abandon his policy.

Mr. Blair: That is complete and total nonsense. That is not the reason why the Conservative party abandoned the policy. That is precisely what the Conservative party says Northern Ireland Members of Parliament should be able to do, so it says that it is good enough for Northern Ireland, but not good enough for Scotland.

Let me just give the answer to the Secretary of State for Scotland, because that was an unwise intervention. This issue came up in the 1960s when Stormont was in existence, when a Labour Government were in power, and when the Conservative party used to try to defeat the Labour Government on the basis of help from Unionist Members of Parliament, as indeed Winston Churchill did in the 1950s. When a Labour Member raised the West Lothian question, the Conservative party said:

"Every Member of the House of Commons is equal with every other Member of the House of Commons and all of us will speak on all subjects and let us hear no more of this nonsense."

Mr. Forsyth: The whole point about the right hon. Gentleman's proposals for a Scottish Assembly is that Scottish Members of Parliament would not be equal to other Members. They would not be able to vote and speak on those matters that affected their constituents and, in that way, he would sow the seeds of the disintegration of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Blair: That is complete rubbish. That is a separate point altogether. The West Lothian question is about English Members of Parliament not being able to vote on Scottish matters. The right hon. Gentleman is raising the issue of Scottish Members of Parliament in relation to those matters devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but that is because they have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament. That is the very purpose of devolution.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No. I want to come back and deal with the Secretary of State. As he has asked me two questions, let him answer a third. If the referendum in Scotland goes in favour of the Scottish Parliament, will he then support it?

Mr. Forsyth: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could answer why the last Labour Government thought, rightly,

that a referendum would be appropriate only after the House had considered the legislation, so that people knew what they were voting for. Is not a pre-legislative referendum asking the people to vote for a pig in a poke?

Mr. Blair: Not at all. It is precisely what the right hon. Gentleman is proposing in relation to Northern Ireland. That is precisely the case.

Mr. Forsyth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Blair: It is.

Let me remind the Conservative party of what it proposes for Northern Ireland: a law-making assembly with around 90 members elected by proportional representation. There is no proposal to reduce the number of Northern Ireland Members of Parliament. Had we not pledged ourselves to a referendum, the Conservatives would have opposed the legislation on those grounds.

I asked the Secretary of State for Scotland that question for a reason. This is what he said last June. This is not going back to the time when he may think he was a victim of teenage madness; it is going back just to last year. He said:

"It is high time Labour committed themselves to seeking endorsement for their programme through a referendum of the Scottish people."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] No, the right hon. Gentleman never said, "Ah." Two days later, we announced a referendum, and he denounced us for it.

Mr. Forsyth *rose—*

Mr. Blair: Sit down. Wait a moment. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. We cannot have two right hon. Gentlemen on their feet at the same time. Who is giving way to whom?

Mr. Blair: I am sorry.

Mr. Forsyth *rose—*

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray) *rose—*

Mr. Blair: I want to be generous to the Secretary of State, but he could not perhaps answer my first question. Let him answer this question when he comes to intervene again. Is it now clear from the Government's position that, if there is a Scottish Parliament and it has the will of the Scottish people, the Conservative party will not abolish it?

Mr. Forsyth: The right hon. Gentleman chose to misrepresent what I said. I made it perfectly clear that, if Labour proposed major constitutional change, the House should have a chance to consider the legislation and there should be a post-legislative opportunity. The idea of a pre-legislative referendum was denounced by the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), who rightly said that it would be constitutionally improper to have a referendum on a proposal that had not been considered by the House.

Mr. Blair: I do not think that we quite got an answer to the question about abolishing a Scottish Parliament, but never mind.

We support devolution; we oppose separatism. The enemy of the Union is no change, not devolution. To insist that the only choice open to Scotland is separation or the status quo is to defy wit, instinct and history. Of course we can celebrate and recognise the differences in our nations within the United Kingdom, because the unity of the United Kingdom should be based not on conformity, but on diversity.

Mrs. Ewing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: I suppose I must.

Mrs. Ewing: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I have been trying to intervene for some time. He has made many references to the concept of referendums. Is he opposed to the idea of a multi-option referendum in Scotland, which would include independence for Scotland?

Mr. Blair: With all due respect to the hon. Lady, that is her policy, but it is not ours. We are not in favour of that. I simply say that the Scottish National party and the Conservative party are at one in believing that the choice for Scotland should be between wrenching Scotland out of the United Kingdom or the status quo. I say that the best way to guarantee a fair deal for people in Scotland is sensible devolution, not separation, and not the status quo.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford) *rose—*

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside) *rose—*

Mr. Blair: I shall give way for the last time, to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker).

Mr. Walker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Does he realise that, by repeating the agonies that we have gone through in Scotland over the impossibility of finding answers to matters such as the West Lothian question, he only draws clearly to the mind of everyone, myself included, other proposals? He will realise that I have never favoured what he is promoting. I am one of the people who suggested that we could find suitable mechanisms through the House to address the key matters. The day after the Queen's Speech, the Labour party could use the Scottish Grand Committee to pass all Scottish legislation, however controversial. That was the Alex Douglas-Home proposal, which I supported.

Mr. Blair: I am sorry to have to remind the hon. Gentleman, but to quote from his election address of 1974, he said:

"Give the people of Scotland more say over their own affairs with a Scottish Assembly."

Hon. Members: More, more.

Mr. Walker: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your protection. If the Opposition are to quote what I supported, I want it quoted in full. My address included remarks about the Scottish Grand Committee, the mechanism that I recommended then, and now.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that is not a point of order for me; it is a matter of argument across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Blair: I think that it is fair to say that, as a Conservative in Scotland, the hon. Gentleman probably does need your protection, Madam Speaker.

[Mr. Blair]

Let us turn from the West Lothian question to the Lord Lothian question. Let us state some facts about the other place. The large majority of those eligible—

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Blair: The large majority of those—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have another point of order.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The right hon. Gentleman promised that he would answer the West Lothian question, but he has not done so yet. He has obviously moved on in his notes. May we have a short adjournment so that he can go back in his notes to find the answer to the West Lothian question?

Madam Speaker: I hope that I am not going to get any more bogus points of order. I want to get on with the debate.

Mr. Blair: The large majority of those eligible to vote in the House of Lords are hereditary peers. The vast majority of them are Conservatives. Indeed, there are more Tory hereditary peers than all the life peers of the other parties put together. It is perhaps hardly surprising then that the Tory campaign guide, which was published last week, states

"The hereditary principle 'an asset to democracy' . . . hereditary peers bring colour, tradition, youth and a wealth of experience to Parliament."

That was topped by Viscount Cranborne, who said:

"Increasingly the amateur politicians who make up the hereditary peerage are coming to represent the common man in Parliament."

Just why do Citizen Cranborne and the other Conservatives like the House of Lords so much? Why does the Prime Minister say that it works? Of course it works for the Tories—they have a majority of hereditary peers. In 1995–96, the Government won 96 out of 106 Divisions; 66 of them, more than two thirds, were won by the votes of hereditary peers. In case it is said that Labour Governments and Tory Governments suffer equally, that is not the case. On average, in a Session under a Labour Government, that Government suffered 68.5 defeats, but, under this Government, there have been 13.5 defeats.

The poll tax would never have got through the other place but for the hereditary element. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members will be delighted to know that I have found my place in my notes. Let us consider what the Conservative party supports. Let us consider the hereditary peerage of Brocket. The first Lord Brocket bought the title from Lloyd-George; the second Lord Brocket was one of Britain's leading Nazi sympathisers; and the third Lord Brocket is serving five years for fraud. Before he went to gaol, he came to the House of Lords, spoke in favour of the poll tax and urged a crackdown on law-breakers.

To justify law-making powers on the grounds of birth is bad enough, but to try to justify such powers on the basis of a permanent Tory majority is almost admirable in its brass neck. Can one imagine if it were the other way round? Let us just suppose, as reasonable people—as we all are, of course—that the majority of hereditary peers were Labour. I bet that the joys of democracy would erupt among those on the Conservative Benches. There were times, of course, when they threatened to erupt. Who was it who told the Tory party conference that hereditary peers were "silly"? It was the Secretary of State for Wales. Who was it who wrote in 1981:

"Hereditary peers no longer command enough respect from the nation as a whole to justify their exercise of legislative powers . . . The House of Lords should be elected on a system of proportional representation, with life peers elected on a regional basis"?

Who was it who wrote that? First, Citizen Cranborne, who has obviously changed his mind, and one William Waldegrave, one Ian Lang and one Tristan Garel-Jones. More than that, let me come to the most absurd part of the argument advanced by the Conservative party

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): If the right hon. Gentleman is so interested in what I said 17 years ago, rather than trying to answer the West Lothian question that has been put to him by my hon. Friends, will he tell us whether he agrees with everything that he said 17 years ago, or indeed with anything that he said 17 years ago?

Mr. Blair: The Welsh Secretary has made a very fair point. His problem, however, is that those are not simply the views that he expressed at the 1980 Tory party conference: they are the views that he has espoused over the years.

Mr. Hague: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: In a moment.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) should not persist. He will obviously not be allowed to intervene now.

Mr. Blair: I should be delighted to give way to the Welsh Secretary again. When he gets to his feet, however, perhaps he will tell us whether, if he agrees with the hereditary principle now but disagrees with what he said 17 years ago—I understand that he can have his change of mind—

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose*—

Mr. Blair: If the Welsh Secretary agrees with the hereditary principle, will he commit the Conservative party to reinstate it if we abolish it?

Mr. Hague: It is very generous of the right hon. Gentleman to allow me to have changed my mind over the past 17 years. However, I am intervening on his speech, he is not intervening on mine. He said that those are views that I had espoused "over the years", implying during the past 17 years. Can he name an occasion on which I have done so in the past 17 years, and tell me whether he agrees with his election manifesto of 14 years ago?

Mr. Blair: It would be interesting to know when the Welsh Secretary stopped thinking that it was the right thing

to do. Can he tell us whether the Conservative party—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] If he cannot tell us, can any of the prospective Tory leadership candidates tell us whether, if we abolish hereditary peers, the Conservative party's policy is to reinstate it? If they think that it is right to do so, why are they not committed to it?

Moreover, if the hereditary principle is right, why does the Prime Minister not appoint more hereditary peers? He has been Prime Minister for six years. If the principle is right, it should be followed; if it is wrong, it should be abandoned. It is to pile absurdity upon monstrosity to say that law-making by birth is right, but only for people born up to a certain time in history.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No.

Did the strain of blue blood suddenly dry up around 1970? By all means, let us debate the replacement and the nature of a reformed second Chamber, and let the Conservative party—as I believe that many of the more sensible Conservative Members would like to do—join in that debate. The reason why they are not prepared to commit themselves to abolishing a Scottish Parliament or to reintroducing hereditary peers is that, deep down, they know that it is a sensible and serious debate.

Let us not insult the democratic intellect—an insult that conceals a naked, self-serving Tory interest—and try to dress it up as serving the interests of the common man. We should be attempting at every point to modernise our Government for today's Britain through sensible reforms, to let our constitution live and breathe. It is a means of achieving progress for our country, not an obstacle to progress.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Those are matters of enormous concern. Will the right hon. Gentleman give the House an undertaking that, in the unlikely event of his becoming Prime Minister, all those constitutional measures would be debated in Committee on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Blair: They will be debated in the normal way, according to the conventions of the House. We have always made that clear. [HON. MEMBERS: "On the Floor of the House?"] They will be debated in the normal way. We have made that clear. I ask the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) whether, if we are elected—*[Interruption.]*

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The right hon. Gentleman knows that the convention has always been for constitutional measures to be dealt with in Committee of the whole House, on the Floor. Yes or no?

Mr. Blair: As my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, the convention is as the House decides—*[Interruption.]* That is the convention. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Let us have a little order in the House. We are debating important constitutional issues; let us all hear them clearly.

Mr. Blair: I must say that it was the Prime Minister who said that the House was sovereign. It will be done in the normal way, according to the conventions of the House.

I return to the question of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire, and tell him that, if we are elected, I hope that Conservative Members will drop their absurd scaremongering campaign on constitutional change.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No; I must make some progress.

We also propose a freedom of information Act to open up our secretive processes. After the Scott inquiry, can anyone be in any serious doubt that such an Act is necessary? We need to roll back the tide of quangos and to have a revival of proper democratic local government. We need change in our parliamentary procedures to make them more accountable, and an examination of party political funding is long overdue. Not all that change can be made at once, of course, but the direction should be clear: decentralisation in place of central control; the assertion of the rights of the citizen against the state; and the modernisation of our democracy.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Speaker: Order. Do I understand that the Leader of the Opposition is not about to give way?

Mr. Blair: Yes, Madam Speaker; I have to make progress.

Madam Speaker: That is quite clear. The hon. Member for Chingford will therefore resume his seat.

Mr. Blair: Our purpose should be the modernisation of our democracy, with its great and proud traditions.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would it not help the House if you reminded the Leader of the Opposition that it is customary for him to sit down when you rise to your feet?

Mr. Blair: If anything demonstrates why our institutions need reform, it is the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater) *rose—*

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: I am sorry, but no; I want to make progress. Conservatives Members can organise as much disruption as they want, but the case will be heard.

Mr. King *rose—*

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Speaker: Order. I have just made it clear to the hon. Member for Chingford that the Leader of the

[Madam Speaker]

Opposition is not giving way. Since I made that clear, however, he has been on his feet three times, trying to intervene and to disrupt.

Mr. Duncan Smith: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have not finished. The Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that he will not give way. It is the custom of the House that, once that has been clearly stated, hon. Members do not continue to pressurise.

Mr. Duncan Smith: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I was simply working on the basis that we have already established that the right hon. Gentleman regularly changes his mind. Therefore, I thought that he might change his mind also on this matter.

Madam Speaker: I like to see a sense of humour in the House.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister and the Conservative party now set their face against any type of change. They say that that is to preserve the British constitution, but I say that it is more to preserve the Tory party and their own interests. They no longer form a Government—they form a self-preservation society.

The motion is a Government motion effectively on Opposition policy, which is extraordinary. It is part of the Government's negative campaign designed to scare people. The truth is that the Prime Minister has little vision of the future. He cannot tell us why anything should be done, but he can give us 1,000 reasons why nothing should be done. His weapon is fear. It is not just fear about the constitution but fear about everything—the nonsense about signing the social chapter and then 500,000 jobs go; the nonsense and lies from the Conservative propaganda machine about a hidden £30 billion spending campaign; although his party used to espouse it, he said that devolution is the "most dangerous idea" ever put before the British people. Make it up, say it with passion and repeat it—that is his course. He believes that it worked for him before—*[Interruption.]* The Conservatives believed that it worked for them before and will work again, but I think that they are mistaken.

To make the weapon of fear work, the Prime Minister needs credibility. When he attempts to frighten people, they remember—

Mr. David Hunt (Wirral, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I understand that Opposition Members are complaining because the Prime Minister's parliamentary private secretary has passed the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) a note. I have very good eyes and I know exactly what happens in the House; I saw what happened, do not worry.

Mr. Hunt: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have been listening carefully to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and I have calculated that he has been asked 16 key questions in this debate. Is it possible for you to communicate to the right hon. Gentleman that he can continue his speech until he has answered them?

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a point of order; it is a point of argument.

Mr. Blair: That is all that the Tories have left—a few dirty tricks, and that is about it. Just look at them—has anyone every seen a party more obviously preparing for opposition?

I said that the Prime Minister's only weapon was fear and that the problem with his wielding that weapon was credibility. Why? Because people remember. They remember the man who took us into the exchange rate mechanism and said that it was the basis of his policy, and then it collapsed around his ears; the man who said that he would never raise tax before the last election and raised it 22 times; the man who said he would be at the heart of Europe and is now at the margins of Europe; the man who said he would end the beef war by last November but still cannot tell us when the ban is going to be lifted; the man who set up the Scott inquiry because of the worry about Ministers' accountability and then ignored the findings because they did not suit him.

The Conservatives no longer frighten, because they are no longer believed—they are not believed about themselves and they are not believed about us. Across the country, fear is being driven out by hope of change: hope that Britain need not be like this and can be better, hope that our constitution can be modernised—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Blair: They do not like it. If they are so confident of their case, and if they believe that they can win the arguments on devolution, the economy and the state of our society and the health service, let them have the courage to call a general election. Frankly, that is all that they have left.

5.24 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Prime Minister said at the start of the debate that he intended to make the constitution a major issue of the general election. Well, on the basis of this debate so far, I sincerely hope so. I do not think that I have ever heard a debate in the House on such a serious matter in which the Government have put together such a tawdry, thin and intellectually unconvincing case. Nor, I am bound to say, have I heard a debate greeted with responses from Conservative Members intended more to disrupt than further the debate than we have heard in the past half an hour. If ever there was a case of using scaremongering tactics and disruption to overcome the opposition when one's argument is thin, we saw it today—and that was not from the Opposition but from those who are supposed to be in government.

The Prime Minister made two points—he made them very badly, but he made them. The first was that Britain today is so well governed that nothing, or at least nothing substantial, needs to be done. I noticed that during the Leader of the Opposition's speech there was outrage among Conservatives at the suggestion that constitutional legislation may not be dealt with on the Floor of the House. However, Conservatives cannot argue—wrongly, in my view—that this Parliament is sovereign but then

argue that this Parliament can control the next. That is a ludicrous proposition. Of course, we cannot give an undertaking as to how the next Parliament will deal with the matter.

Among the tiny measures of change included in the Prime Minister's speech was a significant one—that Parliament would sit for Sessions of two years. Really? That is up to Parliament to decide, not the Prime Minister. The next Parliament will decide that. It is as inappropriate for the Prime Minister to seek to bind the next Session of this Parliament as it would be for the leader of the Labour party to do so. The leader of the Labour party gave a perfectly reasonable answer to a serious question.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the question that I asked the Leader of the Opposition? Does he believe that constitutional measures should always be dealt with on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Ashdown: That is for the next Parliament to decide, but let me see whether I can answer the hon. Gentleman's question. If he is correct, how is it that a major constitutional matter in this Parliament was not debated on the Floor of the House? I refer to the Maastricht treaty. If we could change the role of the House at that time, why not in future, too?

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: I have given way once and want to make progress.

Sir Patrick Cormack: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know better than anyone that the Maastricht treaty was indeed debated on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is not for the occupant of the Chair to comment on any particular answer, but I have a long memory of the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Ashdown: The point at issue is that the House cannot bind the actions of the next Parliament. That is a principle related to the sovereignty of the House, one that the Conservatives keep talking about and to which I shall return later.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham) *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: No; the hon. Gentleman must forgive me for not giving way at this stage. I want to make some progress.

The Prime Minister's first argument is that Britain is so well governed that nothing, or at least nothing substantial, needs to be changed. His second is that our constitution is so fragile that, if we were to change anything, we would risk changing everything, and the whole lot would simply fall apart.

Let me take the Prime Minister's first proposition first—that, since nothing substantial is wrong, nothing substantial should be done and our politics should, substantially, stay exactly as it is. I invite any hon. Member to leave the Chamber, go out on to the streets, stop any member of the public and put that proposition to them. They would get a very blunt, very frank and very different answer.

No one outside this place thinks that politics—the way in which we govern ourselves—is working effectively. They see a system that produces fiascos such as the poll tax or the dangerous dogs legislation because we cannot hold the Government to account and because of the way in which the House passes laws; they see people buying influence from political parties because the rules governing party funding are such a mess; they see scandals such as the arms to Iraq affair and the secrecy and abuse of power that was exposed by the Scott inquiry; they see Parliament tainted by scandals such as cash for questions; they see the introduction, for the first time in our history, of a watchdog to uphold parliamentary standards, because we are incapable of upholding them; they see Members who are presumed to be no longer honourable enough to give evidence without doing so on oath; and they see politicians speaking in a language that most people do not understand and behaving in ways that most people find bewildering at best and offensive at worst.

Those are not the signs of a healthy system that does not need change—they are the signs of a rottenness that has to be rooted out. That is a comment not just on the failings of the Government, but on the failings of the political system. Closed off, over-centralised and out of touch, our political system is not succeeding—it is failing and needs to be modernised. The public and outside observers know that. Are we in this House the only people in the country who do not know it? We should be debating not a question designed to protect the status quo, but how we can modernise our political system so that it is suitable for the next century, not rooted in the last one.

Look around outside the House and see how other institutions have changed in the past two or three decades. Modern firms trading in the global marketplace where Britain has to trade have stripped down the vertical hierarchies that our political system so lovingly preserves. They have devolved power and encourage decentralisation. They share decisions. This place would rather die than share a decision—and probably will in the end. Businesses respond to change; we resist it. Anything that would change the nature of our job and the way in which we work is immediately declared to be an attack on the heritage of the nation—by which, of course, we mean ourselves.

We in this place have become the nation's foremost conspiracy for job preservation. We would knock any trade union into a cocked hat. We need to change here, too, so that, instead of excluding people, we involve them; so that, instead of being closed off, our politics is opened up; so that, instead of power being obsessively centralised in Westminster and Whitehall, it is dispersed, and people are given responsibility to decide more for themselves in their local communities.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with his right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) that one answer to the West Lothian question is that matters affecting English constituencies should be voted on only by English Members in an English Grand Committee?

Mr. Ashdown: My right hon. Friend tells me that he said that there could be an English Grand Committee.

Let us deal with the West Lothian question straightforwardly and, I hope, comprehensively. The issue is simple: should the number of Scottish Members of Parliament be reduced if there were a Scottish Parliament? We are clear about that. The answer is yes. The level of representation should be similar to that for the rest of Britain.

Mr. Forsyth: That is not what Labour says.

Mr. Ashdown: That is up to the Labour party. It can argue its case. I am giving my party's view—a view that we have always held.

Mr. Forsyth: By how many?

Mr. Ashdown: Let us say a figure in the order of 12 or 13.

The West Lothian question is a non-question. It is no more a question than is the West Belfast question. When Stormont existed, did Northern Irish Members of Parliament vote on education and health matters concerning England, Wales and Scotland? Of course they did. That was not a difficulty then, and it is not a difficulty now.

Let me move on a bit.

Mr. Forsyth *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: No, I have answered the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Forsyth *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: No, I have answered the right hon. Gentleman.

Go out and ask members of the public. There is ample evidence of what their response will be. Ask them whether they want a freedom of information Act—which the Government resist. Some 81 per cent. say yes. Why? They know that open government means better government.

Mr. Forsyth: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: The right hon. Gentleman has asked his question and he has had his answer.

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the Member who is speaking does not give way, the other Member must resume his seat.

Mr. Ashdown: It is pretty bizarre—the right hon. Gentleman has a whole winding-up speech ahead of him.

Ask the public whether they want a Bill of Rights and 79 per cent. say yes. Why? They understand the need—God knows they do under this Government—to protect their individual freedoms against the arbitrary abuse of power. Ask the public whether they are happy with the way in which Parliament works. Only 34 per cent.—a little more than a third—are happy about the way in which this place works, but 50 per cent. are happy about the way in which their local council works. After all the withdrawal of power and all the time that the Government have spent deriding local councils and insulting them, the fact remains that far more people trust their local council and the way it works than trust this place. Yet the Prime Minister tells us that nothing should be changed.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I must make progress. If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene later, I shall give way.

Ask the Scottish and Welsh people whether they want more control over their Scottish and Welsh affairs, and the answer again is a resounding, overwhelming yes. They might reject it, but all that we ask is that they should be given the choice. Scotland is the only nation in the world with a separate legal system, but no legislature to determine the laws in that system.

Similar areas and populations all over Europe have their own assemblies, and remain firmly and proudly parts of the nation state to which they belong. I think of Bavaria, with its capital Munich, or Catalonia, with its capital Barcelona. I think of their regional autonomy and regional assemblies, but I do not see Germany or Spain splitting apart. Rather I see countries that have benefited and been strengthened because of the decentralisation of power, the accommodation of diversity and the fact that people are more responsible for the decisions that are made locally.

None of those countries has come unstuck over their equivalents of the West Lothian question. That is because the West Lothian question is no more a problem than was the West Belfast question when Northern Ireland had an assembly at Stormont. None of those countries sees greater self-determination for the historic nations within their borders as a threat to national unity. They see, rather, a means of preserving that unity. None of those countries has a problem devolving powers to raise or reduce tax levels.

The Prime Minister's argument was bizarre. Every parish council in this land has the power to raise tax. Is the Prime Minister's case really that we cannot trust to the Scottish people in a Scottish Parliament powers that are given to every English parish council? That is bizarre and makes no sense.

The Prime Minister: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell me which body other than this House has the power to raise income tax, which is what we are talking about?

Mr. Ashdown: For someone paying taxes, council tax also has to be paid. A tax is a tax. I know that the Conservative party has tried to deceive and betray the country on income tax, pretending that it is the only tax that exists, but everybody knows that that is not true. They know that their local councils can raise and lower taxation and that that has a real impact on their household budgets.

It is not a Scottish Parliament that poses a threat to the United Kingdom—quite the opposite. It is the continuing and contemptuous rejection of the Scottish and Welsh will

for more control over their affairs that poses the real threat to the Union. I do not normally find myself in agreement with Lord Tebbit, but he was right when he said a few days ago:

"We will not save the Union by mocking the idea of a Scottish nation."

A week ago, the Prime Minister talked about a thousand years of British history being undone in a thousand days as if nothing in our constitution had changed for a thousand years. I hope that he will have time for a history lesson before the great debate gets under way in the general election campaign. Such claims are nonsense.

The Prime Minister fails to understand that the lesson of our history is exactly the opposite of what he claims. Our constitution is not a museum piece, but a living thing that has been changing, evolving and constantly renewing itself down the centuries. It is unrecognisable today from what it was 1,000 years ago; that has not been its weakness, but its strength. To argue, as the Prime Minister does, that tampering with our constitution would mean the collapse of Government, national disorder and the end of the United Kingdom as we know it, is rampant scaremongering that flies in the face of our history. Far from protecting our constitution, it denies its very strength.

The great irony and hypocrisy is that the very Government who tell us that the country will fall apart if anyone touches so much as a hair of our constitution are the same Government who have cut down our proud system of local government, destroyed parliamentary accountability in one area of government after another, and established such a tangle of arm's-length agencies that nowadays no Minister is responsible for anything.

They are the very Government who have created a jungle of unelected quangos, stuffed full of party political appointees. Those quangos now spend billions of pounds—one third of all public money—and meet in secret; their members are not required to declare their interests and have no accountability to the people they serve. How dare the very Government who have taken so much democracy out of our system tell us that we cannot change our constitution to put more democracy into it?

But then, resisting reform and democracy is what the Conservatives have always been about: it is what they have always done; it is their traditional role. Let us consider the following words:

"Our system of representation possesses the full and entire confidence of this country".

Was that the Tory party chairman railing against proportional representation? No, it was the Duke of Wellington opposing the extension of the franchise in 1830. Let us consider another quotation:

"Touch one atom of our glorious constitution and the whole is lost."

Was that the Prime Minister firing up the party faithful at a Conservative party conference? No, it was Lord Eldon, a Tory grandee, defending the rotten boroughs in 1832.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I bet his grandson is sitting up there now.

Mr. Ashdown: He probably is.

Who said the following words:

"Constitutional change . . . would endanger the very fabric of Britain . . . it would destroy in years what has been built up in centuries"?

Were those words said by a die-hard Tory opposing votes for women and the suffragettes to the very last? No, this time it was the Prime Minister.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North–West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: No, the hon. Gentleman must forgive me—I shall not give way.

Resisting reform is what Conservatives have always done. In the end, they have always lost, because the case for reform, the need for change and modernisation has always been too strong.

Despite Lord Eldon's protests, despite the scaremongering and despite the protests of the massed ranks of Conservative politicians to the Great Reform Act of 1832, that Act was passed. I assume—although I am not entirely certain—that no Conservatives here today would wish to see it repealed. Despite Lord Eldon's fears, that event did not become the constitutional equivalent of dropping the atomic bomb; it led to the gradual extension of the right to vote in this country, including, after bitter struggles, votes for women—and ultimately it led to the universal adult suffrage that we have today. I assume that no Conservative here today would like to see that reversed.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton) *rose—*

Mr. Ashdown: There is one; I knew that there would be—from Taunton, no less. I was going to say that I cannot vouch for every Conservative party conference delegate, but it seems that I cannot even vouch for the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson).

Mr. Nicholson: The right hon. Gentleman is talking about previous, successful and acceptable attempts to extend suffrage. Is his party committed—as I believe it might be—to introducing voting at 16?

Mr. Ashdown: The Liberal Democratic party is clear in its commitment: it is committed to votes at 16—as indeed we were to votes at 18, when we were undoubtedly opposed by Conservative Members.

At every stage along the way, opponents of reform scaremongered about the consequences of reform—from their defence of rotten boroughs to their opposition to votes for women. They scaremongered using precisely the same terms as the Prime Minister has used today, but time and again they were defeated because people understood in that age that the systems were not working—just as the system is not working today. People understood the need to modernise and improve our system of government.

Mr. Michael Lord (Central Suffolk): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way, as I want to make progress and other hon. Members wish to speak. I have given way enough.

It is now clear that the Prime Minister is determined that the Conservatives will play their historic and traditional role, the role that they have always played: the reactionaries against change, the opponents of modernisation and the preservers of the status quo. They miss the national mood. Reform has risen up the political

[Mr. Ashdown]

agenda precisely because it is so obviously needed in this country. Reform will always best be achieved if it is carried out not by one party, but on a cross-party basis. It is not too late for Conservatives Members to join the debate with that thought in mind—the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) has already said that he would like to do so, and he is very welcome.

I know—and Conservative Members know—that many Conservatives support a freedom of information Act; other Conservatives support the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into British law. Many Conservatives believe, as Edmund Burke believed, in the importance of local decision making in the "little platoons" of our local communities.

There are Conservatives—there are even some in the Chamber—who support proportional representation.

There are even senior Conservative Ministers who—as the Leader of the Opposition so graphically showed—in days gone by supported the idea of a Scottish Parliament. That idea was clearly identified in the Conservatives' 1974 manifesto, on which the Prime Minister stood in the former constituency of St Pancras, North. But to listen to the tone of Conservative opposition today one would not believe that they ever argued for such things.

Mr. Maxton: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I am nearly at the end of my speech, and I want to leave time for other hon. Members.

The moment is right for our country to reflect on the workings of our constitution and our political system. It is the right moment to think of sensible reforms that will make our constitution and political system work better. It is the right moment to ensure that Britain enters the next century with a constitution fit for the modern age, not one preserved as a museum piece from a previous one. With this Parliament now in its dying days, that task must fall to its successor. The Liberal Democrats, at least, are determined to ensure that Britain does not have to wait another five years for the reforms to our political system that our country so desperately needs.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I should remind hon. Members that speeches are now restricted to 10 minutes.

5.47 pm

Mr. Tim Eggar (Enfield, North): When I listened to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), I was very surprised that he appeared unable even to seek to address the West Lothian question. It had never occurred to me that he would come to a debate of this importance without a well-rehearsed answer to that question. But having listened to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and his extraordinarily inadequate response to that question, I reflected on the wisdom of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield.

I recognise that this debate is primarily about devolution and I was delighted to hear the passion and commitment that came from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. His decision to speak this afternoon has been justified by the way the debate has gone and by the inadequacies revealed in the speech by the right hon. Member for Sedgefield.

I shall restrict my contribution to a discussion of the future of the House of Commons.

When I entered the House in 1979, we were embarked on a review of the Select Committee system—the so-called St. John-Stevas reforms. They were broadly welcomed and, by and large, they are believed to have worked. In the intervening 18 years, however, we have not really sought to address our way of working. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) proposed some sensible reforms which have made our lives easier, but even their keenest advocate could not describe them as fundamental. We need a fundamental review of the way in which the House operates as a result of the change in the composition of the House on Conservative and Labour Benches.

Whether we like it or not—I do not—we are in the era of the full-time, career politician. That is a major constitutional departure. Not so long ago, the majority of Members on both sides of the House were part timers and proud of it, and we were not worse legislators as a result. We now have a legislature of 650 Members. In all honesty, how many of us believe that, even if we wanted to, we could all be fully engaged in activities in the House?

We have to think carefully about whether we should substantially reduce the numbers in the House. Most comparable legislatures have about 400 Members of Parliament who do their jobs very effectively. If we were to move to 400 Members of Parliament, we would each have an electorate of about 100,000, give or take a few. That would be an appropriate number if we retained—as I wish we would—the first-past-the-post system.

As we have become a full-time-career House, virtually everyone wishes to become a Minister and join the Executive. I do not believe that that is a fundamentally good position for a legislature. We need to think carefully about whether, as well as reducing the numbers in the House, we should seek to raise the status of senior Members, in particular Chairmen of Committees. For example, it is extraordinary that the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee is not rewarded by at least Minister of State status. I should like a system whereby, for example, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health was as important a policy maker and contributor to the health debate as the Minister of State for Health.

If we are a full-time-career House—and that is inevitable, although not desirable—we need to raise the status and position of senior Members. In other words, we need to produce a career pattern within the legislature, not just within the Executive. I hope that the House will reflect on that.

I also wonder whether we need so many members of the Executive. Comparable Governments elsewhere in Europe generally have two Ministers per Department. That is more than adequate for the political job that Ministers are inevitably called upon to do.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Eggar: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I have only 10 minutes. I should love to give way, but the 10-minutes rule makes that difficult.

I would go further. I wonder why, almost uniquely in Westminster, the Prime Minister of the day can appoint Ministers only from the House or occasionally the House of Lords. In other systems it is expected and accepted that a Prime Minister can appoint Ministers from outside the legislature.

I can think of no reason why a Minister who had been so appointed could not speak at the Dispatch Box, although of course he could not vote. There would be no reason why such a Minister could not take a Bill through a Standing Committee although again he could not vote. In an increasingly complex Government at a time when government is becoming ever more difficult, it is only right that there should be a wider pool from which the Executive could be recruited.

That leads to another issue. If we had fewer Ministers and some of those Ministers were from outside the legislature, we would have to re-examine the present assumption of the total party independence of senior civil servants. I value the British tradition of civil servants' independence, but when the boundaries between policy and management have become ever more blurred—that is inevitable—I wonder whether it is any longer tenable for junior Ministers to be responsible for quite low-level decisions while senior civil servants, at least theoretically, are in charge only of management and administration.

We should discuss whether permanent secretaries or deputy secretaries at Departments of State should be appointed on contracts for the duration of a Parliament, it being fully understood that a new Government would not automatically renew their contracts. In practice, two or three senior civil servants at the top of each Department would become part of the Administration rather than the independent civil service. That would produce considerable advantages, particularly in terms of the quality of management in the civil service and the implementation of policies.

As I looked around and propounded my fairly radical views, I saw on both sides of the House a look of scepticism and bewilderment.

5.57 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): This is a wide-ranging debate and I shall concentrate on my nation of Wales in the context of its place in the United Kingdom. I start with the obvious proposition that the Conservative party, as always, is against constitutional change, whether it is in Wales, Scotland or the House of Lords. It is the traditional defence of the status quo.

Before I deal with the Prime Minister's speech to the Conservative Welsh conference at a hotel somewhere across the border in north Wales, let me say why devolution is needed in Wales.

It was my privilege on two occasions in 1976 and 1977 to speak from the Government Dispatch Box on the Scotland and Wales Bill and then the Wales Bill. I promised the House that, whatever happened, we would return to the issue in due course. Now, 20 years have gone by and we make it clear that, at the earliest opportunity after the next election, we will fulfil the promise that I made to the House 20 years ago.

In 1977 we believed that extending democracy through participation and accountability in Wales would help to preserve and strengthen the unity of the United Kingdom. It will not harm the unity of this kingdom, but enhance it. The quality of decision making will be improved because the decision makers, drawn from all over Wales, will be attuned to the needs of Wales.

Decentralisation of power to the Welsh Office was the precursor of devolution, and in my time, with the addition of agriculture, industry and education, we doubled that office's size. However, it was never the intention that those new responsibilities would permanently be carried out by one man. It is certainly one of the most difficult tasks and it is probably even more difficult in Scotland. When one weighs the red boxes that come at the weekend and tries to master the functions of eight functional colleagues in England, it is no little task. I believe in democratic accountability. The Principality is entitled, within the context of the unity of the kingdom, to have substantial control of its own domestic policies, particularly in environmental and social matters. Let the voters of Wales decide those matters.

The Conservatives have always been against change. They were against the establishment of a Secretary of State for Wales. It was Harold Wilson who appointed the first, more than 50 years after it was deemed desirable for Scotland. Mind you, it was typical of the Conservatives that, once the office had been created, they kept it clutched it to their bosoms and gave it to their nominees, one after the other. Incidentally, that is the answer to the Secretary of State for Health and his threats.

What have we had since? A series of Secretaries of State for Wales, but not one with an electoral base in Wales. Mr. Peter Walker, then the right hon. Member for Worcester, and the right hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) came and went. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—of all people—was appointed, but refused to sleep in Wales. Mind you, the fact that he kept his time in Wales to a minimum meant that he did less damage. At the end of the financial year, despite the appalling situation in Wales, he returned some of the money that had been hard won by the Welsh Office to the Treasury, and he thought he would get some brownie points from the Prime Minister. Now we have the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who has allegedly improved on his predecessor by learning the Welsh national anthem, but nothing has really changed.

What did we have before we had Secretaries of State for Wales? We had a series of appointed Ministers who were asked to add a few minutes each week to their existing responsibilities. We had David Maxwell Fyfe—known familiarly in Wales as Dai Bananas—who was the right hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby; Keith Joseph, then the right hon. Member for Leeds, North-East; and Dr. Charles Hill, then the hon. Member for Luton, who was also known as the radio doctor. They and others came and went, looking after Wales in their spare time.

The Prime Minister talks of a thousand years, but I doubt he knows what has really happened in that thousand years—he has certainly got the dates of the Acts of Union wrong. We took 400 years to right the wrongs done to the Welsh language in the Act of Union of 1536, whereby one could be deprived of one's office for speaking Welsh. Throughout history, the story is the same. In 1846, three commissioners sent to look at the conditions in Wales said that our depravity was the result of using the Welsh language. Even in my grandfather's boyhood, the "Welsh Not" was passed from one child to

[Mr. John Morris]

the next when they were caught speaking Welsh in school. Those are the parts of our history with which the Prime Minister is totally unfamiliar.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: Not to that hon. Gentleman.

The way in which Wales is now governed is exactly like that of a colony with its governor—a nominated appointee, with the executive role of Government carried out by quangos and nominated councils. The Conservative party has been the minority party in Wales since 1852—the last 140 years of the Prime Minister's 1,000 years—so what do the Conservative Government do? They scour Wales for suitable nominees to carry out the executive roles of Government.

Who do they find? While having a splendid lunch in Swansea, Mr. Peter Walker met a man who happened to be agreeable to him and set him up as the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency and, to give him even greater comfort, also made him Welsh governor of the BBC. He then discovered that the chairman had committed more hours than the working week allowed to both those functions. The Public Accounts Committee found the chairman—and the board—of the WDA out and he had to be sent packing. That is the calibre of person who is found during the casual trips made by Welsh Secretaries to Wales.

It is not good enough to be treated as a colony. If we believe in democracy, the constitution must develop to meet the needs of the people. Does anyone really believe that the extension of democracy will not enhance and improve our constitution? The Leader of the Opposition spelled out in detail the way in which the constitution has developed over the years, opposed time after time by the Tory party. The Tory party has not changed its spots, but the time will come when there will be an extension of democracy in Wales and Scotland.

6.5 pm

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): We started the debate with some pretty sorry contributions from the other side of the House, with the haughty, preachy and dodging speech from the Leader of the Official Opposition, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), followed by the sophistry and rumour-mongering of the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). Speaking from my experience of the Liberal Democrats in my area of Sussex, I know that they are experts in scaremongering.

Compare those speeches with that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, which was straightforward and thoughtful—*[Laughter.]* The speech may not have struck sparks with Opposition Members, but it was a straightforward, thoughtful and positive argument against change.

I do not actually share my right hon. Friend's views on constitutional change, and I want to develop some thoughts along those lines. Constitutional reform has not kept pace with reform in other areas in this country. There has been too little improvement, and that has contributed to the complete lack of respect that so many people outside this House have for people inside it, and to the lack of interest in good government. That feeling is not healthy scepticism, but all too often downright mistrust. On that basis, above all else, I argue for a Bill of Rights.

Conservatives believe that the Government are the people's servant, not their master. The Government do not dictate, and we have therefore cut back regulations and controls during our period in office; we have reduced state ownership and increased personal ownership; and we have widened choice and returned power and trust to people. The British constitution, being unwritten, is flexible, which is an advantage; however, rights are not inalienable but conditional, and I believe that we must have a yardstick against which decisions can be made in respect of setting one right over another right.

We can extend the commitment that we made in 1957, when we were one of the first signatories to the convention on human rights in the Council of Europe. That was six years before the treaty of Rome created the European Community. The convention allows individual petition to a court in Europe; would it not be so much wiser to have that same right of individual petition to a court in this country? We have to acknowledge, however, that a Bill of Rights is not an automatic safeguard. It tends to play a minor role in protecting human rights, and we must therefore take further steps in order to make it effective. I shall suggest one or two for consideration.

Should there not be a human rights assessment in every Bill? Should not the Speaker, the Attorney-General or a Committee of Law Lords certify compliance with that statement? Or perhaps there should be a Special Standing Committee to review the matter, with the help of a human rights commissioner or commission, or perhaps a Joint Committee of both Houses—a hybrid of a Select Committee and a Standing Committee—should advise after the first Second Reading, in whichever House it took place.

That is skimming the surface, but I believe not only that we need a Bill of Rights because the country would benefit from it, but that the House should build into its procedures a way of applying that Bill of Rights to our everyday law making.

There has been much talk about reform of the House of Lords. The second Chamber in the British parliamentary democratic system is more important than that in any other democratic system in the world. The anachronism of a hereditary and appointed second Chamber in a long-established democracy is without question. However, I am deeply worried about the reforms outlined from the Labour Benches, because they ensconce in that Chamber the position of placemen and placewomen, doing away with the wisdom, on almost any subject under the sun, of hereditary peers and senior members of the citizenry who are appointed as peers, and there is no improvement in accountability.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): They are still elected.

Mr. Rathbone: They are not elected to the second Chamber. No part of the Labour party recommendation says that they will be elected. That would change my approach to the Labour party's suggestions. They have to be elected. I believe that they have to be elected on a different basis, and to a different time scale, to that on which we are elected in this chamber.

There is no knock-on effect against the monarchy. One need only consider the majority of the other member states of the European Union that have democratic monarchies and an elected, not hereditary, second chamber.

Interestingly, in a recent *Sunday Times* poll, two thirds of Members of the Upper House supported such reforms. It is not a new step for a Conservative Government. Conservative Governments introduced life peers in 1958, women peers in their own right in 1958, and hereditary peers in 1963—although the pressure of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) helped in that process—and the same year a Conservative Government gave the right to disclaim peerages.

Finally, I shall mention the basis of the system by which we are elected to this House. Electoral reform is not new—it is not a passing fad—although it has been highlighted recently in party political debate. We have made quantitative reforms in the past century: broadening the franchise, embracing all males, then all females, lowering the voting age, allowing those on holiday or living abroad to vote in the way they can now. Now we need qualitative reform to make the value of each vote more equal.

The election as a result of which I entered the House in February 1974 was a marvellous illustration of how our first-past-the-post system could give a wrong outcome, because, countrywide, the Conservative party received far more votes than the Labour party, yet the Labour party won more seats in the House of Commons—only by a narrow majority, but it shows how disproportionate our system has become.

I believe that there are four criteria for choosing an electoral system. For a firmly rooted democracy, there should be a close relationship between a representative and his constituency, so I argue for a system that maintains the single-member constituency.

For national unity, there should be representation of minorities, especially nationally based minorities, of which we already have some members in the House, to encourage broad-based national parties' representation in areas where sizeable but no majority support is found. That could be said to be true for the Labour party in the south of England; it is certainly true for the Conservative party in Glasgow and other areas in the north of England. For ease of understanding, the system must be simple for the voter, but let us not complicate that process of analysis; a complicated system of elections can allow the voter to exercise a simple choice. All those criteria should be borne in mind.

To argue for such changes is not disloyal to the Tory past as the party committed to protect individual rights as well as responsibilities, and to support properly founded constitutional democracy. Ownership of an equally valid vote and the opportunity to cast it effectively is the essence of freedom and the cornerstone of national competence, without which I fear that we shall never properly re-create and then conserve a United Kingdom. That important point was mentioned repeatedly by the Prime Minister. Of all people in this country, it is most important to the young of today—the leaders of tomorrow—because they have more to gain or more to endure than most of us. We should always bear that in mind.

6.15 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): This debate will make better reading for the future if we consider the issues against the background, not only of a forthcoming general election, but of a much more serious matter—the crisis of representative democracy, not only in Britain but throughout the western world. Power is too centralised; it is too secretive. It is increasingly authoritarian, not only in the parliamentary system but in the political parties. Fundamental reforms are required.

I want to address primarily the question of Europe, on which I intervened on the Prime Minister, but before I do that I should say that I have introduced two major constitutional Bills into the House, neither of which we have debated.

If we are seriously to look at our constitution afresh, there is a powerful case for saying that we should transform ourselves into a democratic federal and secular commonwealth. I have argued that case. I am not trying to persuade anyone because I do not have time to do so, but we should have a charter of rights; we should have voting at 16. A person who is old enough to be in the forces at 16 or to get a job—if they can—and get married, is of the right age to vote.

I am totally opposed to positive discrimination for women, for I am in favour of equality of representation for women. Every constituency should elect a woman and a man. I am for parliaments, not only for Scotland and Wales, but for England, which disposes of the West Lothian question once and for all. Why should England be denied control of its affairs?

I am in favour, and have been all my life, of a freedom of information Act. I want to liberate local authorities, to liberate the Church of England from the humiliation of having a Prime Minister appoint its bishops and archbishops. I am in favour of the Crown retiring with honour and a good pension to Buckingham Palace, and of the Lords being dispatched, on the grounds that democracy means that we must be able to remove our rulers, and we cannot remove hereditary or appointed Members of the House of Lords.

I have long believed that the Irish people must determine their future, and I believe that we should consider that matter properly and put it to the public in a referendum after the real one—not a pre-legislative referendum.

I admit that I am a republican, and have been for a long time, but I do not believe and never have believed that criticism of the royal family has played any part in that matter, and I watched that awful, cheap and nasty television programme on the monarchy with dismay. The Queen did not ask for the job; she did not choose it; she was born in the right bed of the right parents at the right time. The problem with the monarchy is about the Crown, not the royal family.

The trouble is that Crown powers are enormous. Prime Ministers can go to war without consulting Parliament. The Prime Minister can sign treaties without consulting Parliament. The Prime Minister makes laws in Brussels without consulting Parliament. I was on the Council of Ministers for four years. In 1977 I was President of the Council of Energy Ministers, and every time I agreed to a minor piece of legislation, I was using the Crown prerogative of treaty making.

[Mr. Tony Benn]

The patronage that stems from the Crown is enormous. The past 10 Prime Ministers have put 800 people in the House of Lords, and appointed every bishop, judge and Minister.

It is a wholly undemocratic system of patronage, and it lies at the heart of the quango and the culture of subservience—everybody bowing and scraping, and saying, "Yes, Sir John; oh yes, my Lord; oh yes, your Grace; oh yes, your Majesty." It is no wonder that so many people are happy to go into the European Union, given that we have been run by the Romans, William the Conqueror, the Stuarts, William of Orange and the Hanoverians. Being run by Jacques Santer is what we are trained for—to follow foreigners who tell us what to do. That is an aspect of the Crown.

Another matter that I mention in passing is that I must tell a lie to sit in Parliament. It is not an important one. Last time that I took the oath, I said to the Clerk, who was very polite—he did not query it—that, as a dedicated republican, I solemnly declare, and so on. Why should people have to tell a lie to sit in the House in order to represent their constituents? Why do we not have a decent oath, like, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth"? If we are the High Court of Parliament, there should be a little bit of truth instead of pledges of allegiance to the Crown. That matter must be dealt with.

My real purpose in rising is to deal with the biggest constitutional question of all, which has only been touched on: our relations with the European Union. I am a passionate European. Like many people, I lost an uncle in the first world war, and a brother and many friends in the second.

I am a passionate democrat, but I am not prepared to accept that the royal prerogative should make laws again through Brussels, which it has been unable to do since 1649. After 1649, Parliament made the laws; after 1972, the Council of Ministers made the laws in secret. The European Parliament is not the one that sits in Strasbourg; the Council of Ministers is the real Parliament. It passes the laws and votes in secret, and we are then obliged to follow it.

It is my conviction that, if we adopt the single currency, it will destroy democracy in Europe, not just in Britain. A new political class has now appeared. Its members have a lovely time in Brussels. They are not elected; they talk to each other and hold press conferences. We can get rid of a Prime Minister on polling day—Jim Callaghan went down the pan, and I hope that the present Prime Minister follows his example—but we cannot get rid of Neil Kinnock on polling day. I mention him only to show that I am impartial—I would not mention Sir Leon Brittan.

People who cannot be disposed of on polling day do not have to listen to anyone. When I go to Chesterfield, every street sweeper, doctor or home help is my employer, but if a commissioner goes to Chesterfield or anywhere else, he is above it all.

As I said to the Prime Minister in an intervention, if a central bank is to run everything, the Treasury will move to Frankfurt. It will then be an offence under the Maastricht treaty for a new Minister of Finance, or whatever he is called, or Prime Minister, even to try to influence the central bank. If we hand over public expenditure, taxation and interest rates to a central bank, we shall deliberately have abandoned control of our own country.

All that will lead to cynicism. If a change in economic policy cannot be brought about by voting on polling day, people will be impotent, and the result will be that turnout will fall. That will not be the only problem, but the cynicism about modern politics is that we are all converging on a course of action that I do not necessarily follow.

In America, Mr. Clinton, the most powerful man in the world, was elected by one in five Americans. Four out of five Americans did not register, did not vote or voted against him, and he controls the largest nuclear arsenal in the world. What state will we be in if people do not vote because by voting they cannot change their tax laws, public expenditure, interest rates and, I might add, their agricultural and many other policies? That is the danger.

I say that I am a fanatical European because I am: this is just as a big a threat to voters in Germany, France and Spain as it is to voters in this country. If we had commissioners in London instead of a Parliament, would I be an Anglo-sceptic because I was against it? Of course I would not. It is a democratic argument.

At 3.30 today, I introduced a Bill—just printed, it will never be debated—which repeals sections 2 and 3 of the European Communities Act 1972 so that the Commons will have the final word. That is the best way to deal with it. There would be no fuss about it, and every other member state should do the same. It would put subsidiarity on a statutory basis. If people in Brussels knew that all their proposals had to go through all the different Parliaments, they would be much more careful about their headlong rush into a single currency.

I am the Member for Chesterfield, and proud of it, but I know that my constituents own the powers that I exercise. I do not own them. I cannot borrow the powers from them and give them away. As I have said in the House before, and I say it again on the eve of an election, I am not prepared to give away my constituents' power. I believe not in the sovereignty of Parliament but in the sovereignty of the people, which is why I am wearing a tie in honour of Tom Paine. I do not believe in the sovereignty of Parliament; sovereignty belongs to the electorate, and we, as temporary stewards of their sovereignty, have no right to give it away.

I wish to make it clear, as I have in the past and will during the election, that I am not prepared to vote to give away the electorate's sovereignty. People are entitled to ask that question, and they must find their own answer in their own way. We are confronting a democratic question, which is just as important as the West Lothian question and all the issues that have been raised so far in the debate.

6.25 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and I have one or two things in common: he served in the Royal Air Force, and so did I; and some of his views on Europe are not far from mine. The difference is that he was born into affluence and I was born into poverty, so I approach matters from a slightly different viewpoint.

I have never opposed change. What I demand is that change must be viable, properly structured and seen to be fair, because if it is not seen to be fair it will not be sustainable. I have been involved in the constitutional debate for 50 years, and my views today are the result of those years. I am always amused when people quote back to me things that I have allegedly said or done. My constituents will tell them that the problem is that they know exactly where I stand, because I do not change on constitutional matters. I did not do so 50 years ago; I did not do so in the sixties; and I supported the Alec Douglas-Home proposals. Anyone who wants to look at my election literature in depth will realise that.

Today, I look at Labour's proposals. Is it fair for 83 per cent. of United Kingdom voters who live in England to have, as Labour proposes, a Scot as a Prime Minister and Scottish constituency Members as Foreign Secretary, probably Chancellor of the Exchequer, Scottish Secretary, Patronage Secretary, possibly Transport Secretary, some of the Law Officers, and many of the Ministers of State? If that happens, English voters will say that the Scots are running Westminster, and they will be right.

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: I have only 10 minutes, so I do not have time to give way.

English voters will ask whether that is fair. It is fair if we have a unitary Parliament, but, in addition to the Scots running Westminster, Labour proposes to allow the 73 Scottish Members to come to this House to vote on changes in English education, law and order, local government, the environment, and transport and roads. They will be able to vote for change here, and some of them will end up as Ministers in some of those Departments. Will that be seen to be fair, given that English Members cannot vote on those matters affecting Scotland?

Worse still, Scottish Members cannot vote or speak on education, law and order, local government, the environment, roads and so on—all matters that affect their constituencies. They will become part-time Members of Parliament; perhaps they should be paid a part-time salary. Whatever happens, it will not be seen to be fair.

The West Lothian question was not dealt with today.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: No, I shall not give way, because I only have 10 minutes.

As for the West Belfast question, there is a democratic deficit in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland needs local government with all the decision-making powers that it has in the rest of the United Kingdom. It also requires a Northern Ireland Grand Committee. I shall deal with Grand Committees later.

Under Labour's proposals, the Scots would be seen to be running Westminster and also Edinburgh. Would that be fair to the 83 per cent. of voters living in England? That is the question we must ask ourselves. Would it be seen as fair by the people living in England, who, after all, are the majority of the taxpayers and voters by a long way—83 per cent. is not a tiny proportion.

Would it be fair for Scotland, in such circumstances, to keep all 73 of its Members of Parliament? Would it be fair for Scotland to retain the Goschen-Barnett formula? Would it be fair for the Scottish work force to have to pay the tartan tax, without disadvantaging them in the jobs market? Those are the questions that must be addressed throughout the United Kingdom.

It is interesting that the poster to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister drew attention states that there will be no increase in income tax in Scotland in five years. How can that make sense, when Labour proposes to give powers to the Scottish Assembly to raise tax? It is crazy.

Would it be fair for people who work for Scottish firms and who are paid from Scotland not to have a say about the tartan tax and the rate at which it would be implemented? We must consider the fairness of the proposals.

I am not opposed to devolution. I am in favour of devolving decision-making as far down as is practical, but it must be structured properly, and it must be seen to be fair by the entire electorate, not just by a few people who want something.

When people say to me, "It's all right for you, Mr. Walker," I remind them that I am a minority of a minority: I am a Scottish Conservative. The Scots are a minority in the United Kingdom, and we receive a minority of the votes in Scotland.

Matters would have been different if we had introduced the Alec Douglas-Home proposals, which I supported. Labour's proposals are unfair, unworkable and—worse than that—they are dangerous. They will lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. The backlash will come not necessarily in Scotland, but certainly in England, because of the unfairness of the proposal.

The Liberals' proposals for a federal structure are theoretically viable. The problem is that they have been peddling them for 100 years, and they have not yet sold them to the vast majority of the electorate—the 83 per cent. who live in England. Until the Liberals can do that, their proposals will remain a theoretical possibility.

Labour's proposals are not necessary. We should examine the proposals discussed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which Labour could implement the day after the Queen's Speech, if they ever became the Government. They could use the Scottish Grand Committee to put through all Scottish legislation.

That could be achieved under a Labour Government, because they would have a majority of Scottish Members of Parliament. It would pose no risk to the Union, it would meet the demands for the Scots to have their own say, and the Scottish Grand Committee could meet in Edinburgh or anywhere else in Scotland, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has shown so clearly. Other Members of Parliament who are Ministers could attend, as has been shown. That is a viable proposition, which could be implemented by a Government with a majority of Scottish Members of Parliament.

We must consider what is practical, viable and fair. Let us get away from all the grand theory. My interest in life is aviation. The world knows about all the plane crashes that have occurred. Theoretically, the planes should have flown; practically, they did not. We must examine the practical aspects.

Would it be practical for English Members of Parliament to go out into their constituencies and tell their constituents what is being proposed? Is it sensible? Is it saleable? The

[Mr. Walker]

product is not saleable. Is it saleable for Scottish Members of Parliament to go back to Scotland and say that they want to introduce a system which they know will produce a backlash and cause problems?

The Scots will be asked to vote on the proposal before the legislation has been through Parliament. The idea is crazy. How can one vote on something until one knows the exact contents of the proposal?

Mr. Ernie Ross: It is all in this book.

Mr. Walker: I have read that ghastly book—that is why I can speak about the matter. I read most things. The problem that Labour Members have is that they do not read in detail what is being proposed by their party. It may be all right for them in their closed little niches in Scotland, but they should ask the Scottish people whether they want to buy a pig in a poke. When Tam tells them that, they will believe him and listen. The package is unsaleable, unworkable and dangerous.

6.35 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): The debate is about the constitution. I hope that I shall be forgiven if I give only a brief part of my limited time to devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—not because I think that that is a matter of no importance; far from it.

My starting point is that, particularly in the case of Scotland, there has for many years been growing evidence of the wish of the Scottish people to have more control over their own affairs. We may have misjudged that, but we have already anticipated the problem by saying that the first step is to hold a referendum. If, on the basis of that referendum, the Scottish people do not want to proceed with devolution, it will be scotched there and then. The same will apply to the people of Wales and people in this country.

I am not upset by that. To those who worry about the unity of the United Kingdom and the threat that would be posed to it, I would say that I speak as an Englishman, rather than as a member of any other part of the Union of the United Kingdom, but I genuinely do not feel the slightest resentment at the thought that Scottish, Welsh and other Members of Parliament will continue to take an active part and bring their own experience to debates that concern only England. They are my fellow-countrymen. We are part of the Union of the United Kingdom, which is a real Union indeed.

Our historical experience might lead us to the opposite conclusion from the one that the Prime Minister drew. If, year after year and decade after decade, one frustrates the wish of a national group within the United Kingdom for greater self-government, one is likely to alienate those people, push apart the Union and make them think about the false solution of separation and the establishment of a separate state.

To my Northern Ireland friends, I say that I am not sure what the answer would be. Looking back over the history of Ireland and England since the 19th century and the first proposition of home rule, I wonder whether—allowing for the fact that there had to be two assemblies, not one—if we had been able to offer the Irish people home rule in the 1890s or even before the first world war, we might still be the Union of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The fact that that was resisted turned what was then a movement for home rule into a demand for separation and separate existence and identity. The effect may be the opposite of that which the Prime Minister anticipates.

I shall discuss briefly several issues before I come to the really big one—and I am sure that hon. Members know what that is. We must reform the House of Lords: it is laughable to try to pretend that the hereditary tradition and composition can continue. It simply cannot. There is also a case for electoral reform—if we had more time, I am sure that hon. Members would develop that argument more thoroughly. I have never supported proportional representation, but I do appreciate the case for the alternative vote.

We have seen 18 years of minority rule by the Conservative party. It has never exceeded 45 per cent. of the vote in any election, yet the Conservatives have had huge majorities in Parliament. The positions of Members of Parliament are strengthened if they can say that they represent the majority of their constituents, as a result of a single ballot or a second-preference vote. I think that that is an acceptable constitutional reform, which would have some effect on parliamentary representation and on the ultimate numerical strengths in Parliament.

I also seek a general improvement in the methods of making Ministers responsible and accountable to Parliament. There is a case—although I do not have enormous confidence in the likely outcome—for a freedom of information Act. We would have to examine its provisions very carefully, as they might not work quite as people would wish. I think that we should also consider strengthening our Select Committee system. Select Committees have performed very well since the St. John-Stevas reforms, and I think that they could be even more effective if given greater powers and more staff.

Because I believe that the Executive must be made more responsible to Parliament and that only the elected representatives of the people have the right to make the laws that govern our land, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I wish to see a radical change in our constitutional relationship with the European Union. Over a vast and ever-growing area of our national life, the United Kingdom Parliament and Government no longer make the laws or take the big decisions about our economic and external policies. The European Union, the Brussels Commission and, increasingly, majority voting in the European Council fulfil that function. If the laws of our country are in conflict with the superior laws of Brussels, our laws must give way.

I remind the House of the comments of the then President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, to the European Parliament nearly nine years ago—I thought at the time that they gave a terrible warning. On 6 July 1988, he said:

> "Ten years hence 80 per cent. of economic legislation, and perhaps even our fiscal and social legislation as well, will be of Community origin".

That was almost 10 years ago, but what is the position today? Hon. Members have attempted to elicit the score, only to be told that the information could not be made available except at inordinate cost.

Nevertheless, some figures have been produced. In a written answer on 28 January this year at column *131*, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster revealed that 236 statutory instruments enacted European Community directives in 1992. There were 134 in 1993, 198 in 1994 and 211 last year. Those statutory instruments are equivalent to Acts of Parliament—they are not regulations.

I maintain that the input of Community legislation into Britain is probably greater than that of domestic legislation. I might frighten hon. Members if I tell them the number of EC regulations that have been adopted. Some 1,750 regulations were adopted in 1994, and more than 3,000 in 1995.

In the same speech, Mr. Delors said:

"what I am afraid of is that some of these national parliaments are going to wake up with a shock one day and that their outraged reaction will place yet more obstacles in the way of progress towards European Union."

Is it not time to wake up? We must not strain at gnats and swallow camels in terms of constitutional deformation and loss of democratic power. It is time to reclaim our powers through the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield presented to the House this afternoon.

6.44 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): We always listen to the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) with both interest and respect. He has made a serious speech, encompassing some very important points. I hope that he will forgive me if I do not engage him in debate on his latter points—much as I am tempted to do so. I am also tempted by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who made a typically idiosyncratic, but entertaining and fascinating, speech.

I am allowed to speak for only 10 minutes—the limitation is understandable, but it tends to destroy debate—so I shall make only a few points.

No one could seriously claim that Parliament is not in need of some reform when we see acres of green leather around us. It is most unfortunate—to put it mildly—that more hon. Members, particularly Conservatives, are not present to debate this fascinating and important subject.

I intervened during the speech of the Leader of the Opposition to make the important point that all constitutional issues should be debated on the Floor of the House. I believe that any constitutional legislation introduced by any Government should be treated in that way. Although I shall do what I can to ensure that the right hon. Gentleman does not become Prime Minister, in that unhappy event, I hope that he would honour the pledge that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House forced him to make today—we all heard it—and ensure that any constitutional legislation was debated on the Floor of the House.

Several areas need reform. I have always advocated fixed-term Parliaments, and the frenetic events of recent days and weeks have confirmed my belief. Unless a Government are defeated on the Floor of the House in a vote of confidence, they should serve their time—whether it be four or five years. We should quickly incorporate that reform into our constitution.

I am also a strong believer in electoral reform. I do not believe in proportional representation and I do not believe in the alternative vote. I believe strongly in the relationship between a Member of Parliament and his constituency. Every hon. Member should have 50 per cent. plus one of the vote.

Some 14 or 15 years ago, I introduced a private Member's Bill on the subject of the two-round election. If no candidate receives 50 per cent. plus one of the vote in an election, the electors should be allowed to consider in the intervening week who they want to represent them in Parliament. I think that that would give a new emphasis to the constituency and counter the presidential nature of our elections, which I deplore.

I also believe strongly that mistakes have been made in the past 18 years. I regret the fact that so much power has been taken away from local government. I am totally unrepentant about my consistent opposition to the abolition of the Greater London council. Although I held no brief for that institution—I thought that it was riddled with flaws—it was wrong to deprive this great city of a directly elected strategic authority. I believe that the matter should be put right at an early date.

The very structure of our kingdom lies at the heart of this debate. This is a unitary state. Although our constitution has evolved—I hope that I have said enough in the last two or three minutes to show that I readily accept that improvements can be made to it—to threaten the very fabric of our unitary state is an extremely serious matter. The ill-thought-out plans for devolution in Scotland and Wales would threaten the fabric of our unitary state.

It is no good the leader of the Liberal Democrats trying, as he did, to make false analogies with Spain and Germany, which have a totally different history from this country. They have not evolved in the same way. They do not have the long background of evolution towards a unitary state that we have. I would be very reluctant to tamper with that mechanism.

We have been a little remiss in not giving closer thought to devolution over the past 18 years. I fought very strongly—as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) knows, because we were honourable opponents at that time—against the devolution proposals of the former Labour Government. I believed that they were misconceived and wrong. Nevertheless, I would like to have seen something similar to the appointed but not elected representative assemblies in Scotland and Wales, as was advocated by the late Lord Home of The Hirsel, then Sir Alec Douglas-Home, in one of his papers.

Mr. Maxton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Patrick Cormack: No, I do not have time. I am extremely sorry.

Had we gone down that road at that time, we probably would not be having this debate today.

I shall now deal with the bicameral nature of our legislature, because no one can seriously defend the automatic right to sit in Parliament conferred by birth. I have never sought to defend that, and never would. I believe that it would be possible to have House of Lords reform that preserved an hereditary element along the lines of the Acts of Union of 1707 and 1800, because the accumulated experience that certain families have, and the

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

contribution of youth that the hereditary element brings, is not lightly to be cast aside. Many peers, including Labour peers—including Lord Strabolgi—have put forward a variety of alternative proposals that would preserve an element of that. Those proposals should be seriously addressed and properly considered. I hope that that will be done.

What alarms me most about the proposals for reform of the other place are those that would create an assembly of placemen; that would give more and more power to the party hierarchy; and that would lead to the appointment of apparatchiks, who would merely do the bidding of their political masters. I oppose such reforms for the same reason as I would oppose to the end of my days any list system for this House, because there are a number of hon. Members on these Benches who probably would never have got near the place on a list system.

Mr. Mackinlay: And over here.

Sir Patrick Cormack: And over there, too. I quite agree. I do not want to see such an Assembly down the Corridor.

The quality of debate and the accumulation of wisdom and experience in the other place is second to none of any legislative chamber in the world, and we cast that away to the disadvantage of this country and its good governance. I do not believe that the other place should have the power of veto, and it does not have it, but I believe that the power of scrutiny, examination and delay is good. The one Bill in the past 18 years that the other place turned down was the War Crimes Act 1991, and that decision was one of the wisest ever taken in Parliament against one of the most foolish and inept measures proposed by any Government in recent years.

We have to think most carefully when we decide what reform should take place. Reform there should be, but we must not rush pell-mell into a whole range of reforms, we will turn this place into a legislative quagmire. Her Majesty's Government will not easily be carried on, in the spheres of health, housing, foreign affairs and so on, if we have before this place a whole range of constitutional measures. The biggest threat implicit in any Labour victory—I do not, of course, believe that there will be a Labour victory—is the threat to the constitutional structure and fabric of this nation. It is a threat that should be recognised, trumpeted abroad and resisted by any democratic politician.

6.54 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) referred to the United Kingdom as a unitary state. It is up to a point; it is one kingdom, but it is not a uniform one. There are various differences within it, and we have seriously to address how best to reflect them. We will find the answer to some extent in the hon. Gentleman's comments about the need to look again at local government and to consider certain forms of devolution more seriously and more closely. The hon. Gentleman made a thoughtful speech as, indeed, did the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore).

I am sorry that I cannot quite praise the Prime Minister's speech and that of the Leader of the Opposition. I found the Leader of the Opposition's speech extremely disappointing. Despite the fact that, throughout the Prime Minister's speech, Opposition Back Benchers were making noises about Northern Ireland, the Leader of the Opposition found it impossible to find time even to consider the issue of Northern Ireland during his speech.

The Prime Minister found some time for Northern Ireland, but I found what he had to say extremely unsatisfactory and riddled with errors. He tried to justify his view on Northern Ireland, which he acknowledged was very different from his view on the rest of the United Kingdom, by referring to special circumstances in Northern Ireland. When he elaborated on those special circumstances, one seemed to be key. He said that there were no elected representatives from Northern Ireland from parties that could form a Government here. That was a very carefully crafted phrase to avoid having to acknowledge the fact that the Conservative party cannot get votes in Northern Ireland because its policies are seen by the people of Northern Ireland as hostile to their interests on fundamental matters.

There was another reason. Until 1974—when the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) withdraw the Whip from my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Sir J. Molyneaux), and others—Northern Ireland returned at elections an overwhelming majority of members who were in a national party. There is simply no basis in fact for the distinction that the Prime Minister tried to draw. It is commonplace on these matters to say that Northern Ireland is different, but there are differences. There are special circumstances in Northern Ireland. There are cultural differences and national differences, but those can be replicated in other parts of the United Kingdom—in Wales and Scotland.

The only real point of difference in Northern Ireland is that we have a foreign Government with territorial ambitions—our own Government are at best neutral and at worst seek to undermine the Union—and we have terrorism. That is the difference. The fact that, because we have terrorism, the Government treat Northern Ireland differently is very dangerous, because it is a precedent that might be followed elsewhere. The Government must consider that very carefully.

The Prime Minister claimed that his policy is aimed at retaining Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. It is as well that he gabbled that sentence, because nobody in Northern Ireland believes him—and rightly so, because the proposals that the Government espouse on matters such as the framework document would very gravely damage the Union. Indeed, I suggest that they were intended to do so.

I regard the position on Northern Ireland—and the position on Europe—as the biggest constitutional issues that face the United Kingdom. The House will understand why I concentrate more on the former than the latter. Both must be treated seriously. We must deal with the fundamentals. The fundamental question for Northern Ireland is whether we have a Government who are prepared to sustain the Union and to regard themselves as having a responsibility to everyone in the Union. That is the key question.

The Government portray themselves as being in favour of the Union. They campaign here—that is what they were doing today—and in Scotland, but they do not realise that they will have no credibility in Scotland as a champion for the Union while they are working to undermine the

Union in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State for Scotland knows how close Northern Ireland and Scotland are: hon. Members based in the south of England sometimes do not realise that. The Secretary of State will know that people in Scotland notice the difference between the Government's policy on Scotland and their policy on Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) raised that point when he intervened in the Prime Minister's speech, but it was not answered.

We favour a form of devolution, and we can answer the West Lothian question with no problem. There are three different answers to it, one of which was touched on by the Liberal Democrats, who referred to the old Unionist policy of home rule all round. It was a Unionist policy before it was a Liberal Democrat policy. The problem with home rule all round is the size of England: the 80 per cent. in England would dominate. Despite attempts to revive that policy, it is not realistic.

Another answer to the West Lothian question was given by Simon Jenkins in *The Times* last week, who wrote in praise of Belfast—quite rightly, too. However, I prefer the answer that is based on the simple proposition that the important aspect of devolution or the establishment of separate parliaments is not the legislative powers, but the fiscal arrangements and whether the fiscal unity of the kingdom is being maintained. Key decisions on tax raising and expenditure involve, by extension, all key policy decisions, because most key policy decisions involve expenditure. If we have, as I believe we should, fiscal powers and powers to decide expenditure and main areas of policy here, clearly there must be full representation here. The danger with Labour's proposals for Scotland is that they would disrupt the fiscal unity of the kingdom.

The Jenkins defence in *The Times* last week interestingly referred to local taxation in terms of rates. The danger is that Labour is dealing not with local, but with national, taxation. While income tax is decided here, all the people are entitled to equal representation here. It is the old business of no taxation without representation. It is not a new point.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley supplied me earlier with the first report of the Cabinet Committee on the Irish question, dated 4 November 1919, which contains the proposals that emerged later as the Government of Ireland Act 1920. It says:

"In regard to representation in the Imperial Parliament the Committee are clear that so long as the Imperial Parliament exercises taxing powers in Ireland, Ireland must have the right to representation in the Imperial Parliament on the basis of population."

Interestingly, the Government failed to provide for that, because they cut Northern Ireland's representation: it no longer operated on a population basis. Its representation was about half what it was entitled to based on its population.

We can take away the West Lothian question. When we do that as I have suggested, we end up with a local administration which, in some respects, is more akin to local government than to the fully blown parliament some other people refer. This is where we match up with the points made by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire. Regional assemblies, albeit with some legislative powers, as in the proposals of the Ulster Unionist party, do not raise the same fundamental questions as parliaments.

Interestingly, the Conservative Government have prepared the way for action in Wales and Scotland by changing local government into a single tier. It will not look that strange if Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which also has a single tier of local government, have as the upper tier a regional assembly with powers perhaps greater than those of English county councils. That would reflect the regional characteristics of the United Kingdom. England's size is significant, and that dominance causes problems for the regions. The regional dimension of the United Kingdom must be addressed.

7.4 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): The debate has been extremely interesting. Hon. Members should reflect on the fact that we are in the House of Commons on a Thursday evening, on a one-line Whip, with no decision, and no vote to take at the end of the evening, yet there is quite heavy attendance. That is because the House has always taken the constitution and constitutional reform very seriously. Reforms must be practical and workable, and should be introduced for a purpose.

Given the attendance tonight, and the fact that hon. Members have put their cases in a non-partisan way, we must ensure that specific proposals for reforming our constitution are considered by all hon. Members. The most significant point that has been made during the debate was made, strangely enough, by the Leader of the Opposition. He refused point blank to confirm the age-old custom that, when constitutional legislation is introduced, the Committee stage is taken on the Floor of the House. He confined himself to saying that we cannot bind our successor Parliament, and that the Labour party will make up its own mind. Constitutionally that is correct, but his admission was extremely significant.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Arnold: No.

What would be the programme for the next Parliament of a theoretical Labour Government? They would have to deal with the legislation arising from Maastricht 2, and with legislation on a European single currency, on Scottish and Welsh devolution, on reform of the House of Lords and on reform of the electoral system. Every one of those items is constitutional.

What would happen? On practical grounds, the legislation would be stuffed into Committee, and the Committees would be packed. Let us be under no illusion: a Labour Chief Whip would not put on the Committee dealing with legislation on the governance of Scotland the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), the originator of the West Lothian question. The membership of the Committee would also exclude Labour Unionist Members, who are a little more timid than the hon. Member for Linlithgow and are not putting their heads above the parapet.

Given the electoral squeeze and the small number of Liberal Democrat Members that there will be in the next Parliament, I wonder whether they have realised that they may not even be represented on the Standing Committees that deal with such legislation. Bearing in mind the enthusiasm of the small nationalist parties and the Liberal Democrat party, and the fact that only one or two members of such Committees are from small parties, the way in which these matters would be handled in a House of Commons with a Labour majority gives us food for thought.

[Mr. Arnold]

This afternoon, we have seen the Labour party blundering into a morass. It is incredible that, after 18 years in opposition, it has no clear idea and no detail of the reforms that it wants to introduce. The Leader of the Opposition was prepared only to dedicate himself to jeering at the House of Lords, because that is a nice easy sell to the left wingers on his Back Benches. It shows that the Labour leopard has not changed its spots. *[Interruption.]* It is clear from the reaction of Labour Members that they have not looked at their history books.

When did the House last try to reform the House of Lords, and what happened? There was a stitch-up between the two Front Benches, and the Back Benches chucked out the proposals under the most extraordinary alliance of Enoch Powell and Michael Foot. Plans to reform the other place need to be laid down extremely carefully. We should ask ourselves what we are trying to achieve.

For a start, we should ask what was the origin of the House of Lords. Indeed, what was the origin of our House of Commons? It is the House of the communities—the communities that send us here to represent our counties and boroughs—but what was the purpose of the other House? It was to represent the great vested interests in the land, and to bring them into the process of government. What were those great interests? They were the landowners and the Church. Obviously, landowning was an hereditary matter, and that interest is still in our legislature—as is the established Church of England.

Our constitution has evolved. To realise that, we need only run through the details of the admission of representative peers from Scotland and Ireland, the inclusion of the Law Lords, and the massive increase in the number of life peerages. They have existed only since 1958. Female life peers were admitted in that year, and hereditary women peers were admitted in 1963. Reform has taken place over the years, but, in reforming the other House, we must be very clear about what we are doing.

If we chuck out the hereditary peers—which strikes me as an interesting idea—what will we be left with? We will be left with a rump. We will be left mostly with peers who will be in the other place merely because of the patronage of the establishment of this House. In that event, there would be pressure in favour of bringing about membership of the other House by different means.

One possibility is indeed an elected House. If Members of that House were elected in the same way as we are, the paramountcy of our House would immediately be challenged. If those Members were elected through the same system as us, and agreed with us, what would be the point of it? If they disagreed with us, something would be wrong. If they were elected through a different system, and disagreed with us, there would be wrangling about which House was more representative of the British people—and it could well be argued that our House was not the more representative. Any form of election to the other House will mean a challenge to the paramountcy of this House, but there is no way in which that House down the Corridor can claim that it has greater authority than our House, because we—uniquely—are elected by the British people.

So what do we do? Do we revert to the original idea of nominations by the vested interests? Who are the vested interests of today? Eighteen years ago, the vested interests were clearly the trade unions, and nominations by them would have meant Jack Jones, Hugh Scanlon and Arthur Scargill sitting in the other place. I do not think that many people today even know who the trade union leaders are.

Who, then, are the great vested interests? Are they in the press, or in television? Should those people be down the Corridor? How do we bring about the representation of those vested interests? How do we work out who should represent large business, small business, the professions and other Churches and faiths? As has been said, it is a complete morass. The fact is that, when we have constitutional change, we must make practical decisions here in the House of Commons.

We do not know what dirty deals have been done, and what secret treaties have been agreed, with the Liberal Democrats, who are enthusiastic about proportional representation. I fear that, in the successor Parliament, we shall see yet another push towards PR. Let me repeat the question that I asked earlier. What is the purpose of this House of the communities? It is to represent the boroughs and counties of the kingdom. Any attempt to introduce PR will break the sacred link that all of us have with our constituencies. *[Interruption.]* Members of the Scottish National party may well jeer, but I value that link immensely. I value my responsibility to speak and vote in the House on behalf of my constituents. Any form of PR would break the link with our constituencies, and would end our sole responsibility.

There are seven constituencies in west Kent, all of which, very wisely, have returned Conservative Members. Under PR, those seven Conservative constituencies might return four Conservative Members, two Labour Members and one Liberal Member. What would that do? A constituent comes to me with a problem, and I say, "If you vote Labour, go and see a Labour Member." A constituent wants to talk to me about housing or social security, but that may not be my issue; I tell him to go to one of the other Tory Members, if he is a Tory voter. PR would provide an opportunity to pass the buck. We must retain our electoral system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

7.14 pm

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I shall confine my remarks to Scottish issues. Hon. Members will understand why. I believe that the Welsh should do what the Welsh people want, that the English should do what the English people want and that the Scots have won the right to decide among themselves how they will be governed.

The Scots are a difficult nation. Almost all our history has been scarred by deep and continuing divisions among ourselves about how we should be governed. That has been so since the brawling barons of Wallace's day. Today, I stood on the steps where Sir William Wallace was accused of treason, tried, quartered and dispatched around the country. His head was stuck on a pole. That was because of what he felt about how Scotland should be governed. At least we have come far since that day, and the same thing is unlikely to happen to those of us who feel that there ought to be a parliament in Scotland, but do not necessarily want to renegotiate the treaty of Union at this point.

The days of William Wallace were followed by the struggles of Jacobite times, and our repeated failure in this century to unite behind the cause of home rule. National division, and even civil war, have been more common in the Scottish experience than national wars of independence ever were. It is often forgotten, for instance, that there were as many Scots in arms against Bonnie Prince Charlie at Culloden as there were fighting for him.

Scotland therefore faces an historic choice as we head towards the new millennium. We can continue to divide under our different party political banners, or we can unite behind a cross-party and popular consensus that can and will deliver a workable parliament for Scotland. The Scottish convention provided an opportunity for that to happen. Unfortunately, although some 80 per cent. of the factions in Scotland were represented at various times during the discussions that took place, the Conservatives chose not to be a part of them, because—as has been proved in the speeches that we have heard today—most of them are opposed to any form of change. I do not blame them for that; I am not being moralistic. I understand their opposition.

We keep arguing about the difficulties and differences involved in the West Lothian question, but, irrespective of what happens in Scotland and whatever the political hue of our voting, given the way in which the Parliament of the Union has been set up, we as parliamentarians have a right to be here arguing our case on questions of macro-economics and defence.

I do not want to come down from Scotland, after the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, to argue about English education, but we must understand something else. We as Scots regret very much the attempt to anglicise our education system. Since the days of John Knox, we have been proud of our history in that regard. Education was to be provided free and at the time of need: that was, perhaps, a forerunner of the theory of the national health service.

In modern times, Scots have been irritated by the fact that, irrespective of how we have voted in Scotland—especially since 1955—the Conservatives have never had a majority of the vote. When they came here, to this Parliament of the Union—*[Interruption.]* I am not arguing the case for Labour. The vote for the Opposition parties combined has been greater than the Conservative vote—in recent years, much greater. The Tories have been left with a rump of Members who are content to come down here, to the Parliament of the treaty of Union, and to pursue aims that the Scots are most unwilling to accept.

The classic example of that was the poll tax. It was never proved to be illegal, although it was certainly immoral, and it was inflicted upon Scotland. We abhorred that tax, hated it, but we had to suffer for a year before the Government attempted to introduce it in England and Wales.

The poll tax was imposed on Scotland because Scottish Conservative Members were prepared to go along with the majority of Conservative Members here in an experiment on the Scots to see whether the tax would work. In part, the decision to impose it was malevolent because the Scots had voted Labour, SNP and Liberal Democrat. As a form of punishment, if nothing else, we were to be guinea pigs to test the success or otherwise of that obnoxious, iniquitous and unfair tax.

Once the tax was imposed on England and Wales, English Conservative Members began to feel pressure from their constituents against the tax when they realised that it was not as even-handed or as fair as they had first imagined. *[Interruption.]* There are always masochists, but, irrespective of the views of some groups, Parliament decided the issue, and it was English Members of Parliament who imposed the tax on the Scots. Even those hon. Members who did not wish to support that decision trooped through the Lobby to a man to impose the tax on the Scots. Is it any wonder that, in recent years, Scots have felt irritated at being partly anglicised by the set-up?

I have consistently argued for a Parliament in Scotland, and I do not see any difficulty with the West Lothian question. For heaven's sake, 72 Scots Members will come back here and there will be 17 from Northern Ireland and 40 from Wales. If the Celts can combine their forces, get their act together, we shall have 129 votes in this Parliament in which there will be 524 English Members. It will take some rebellion by the non-Celts to overturn any decision by the House. We have said vociferously for years that we in Scotland have a right to determine at least our domestic affairs. What could be fairer?

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Two minutes.

Mr. McKelvey: I have two minutes to change the constitution.

As a former negotiator, I am not prepared to agree that there should be any reduction in the number of Members in the new Parliament which, obviously, will have a Labour Government. However, if this august body says, as is its right, that we should renegotiate the treaty of Union, let us sit down and do that. As far as we are concerned, nothing changes with a Scottish Parliament if that is what the people of Scotland desire.

The Welsh have every right to determine their own affairs. If they want an assembly or a parliament, I will fight to the last to ensure that they have the right to decide. If the English are so concerned about the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish voting on their education issues, they can opt for an English Parliament. If the people of England want an English Parliament to consider their domestic issues, they will have one, irrespective of what hon. Members think. The Scots deserve a parliament, and they will have one, because a Labour Government will be returned and will see to it.

7.24 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I hope that the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) will forgive me if I do not follow his logic and his argument, although I have close Scottish relations and my wife, who is also a Member of this place, is half Scots and her mother's family came from Maryhill in Glasgow some years ago.

The blight on our constitution is career politicians. Increasingly, over the years that I have been here, there have been intakes of people who perhaps lack principle. They do not necessarily lack experience, but because they are determined to get to the top, they are inclined to change their views almost as frequently as the weather changes, and they do so to appeal to the leadership of their party and the establishment. That relates to all political parties and not just the governing one.

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

I regret that fact, because, if there were more principled people on both sides of the House, we would have better legislation. Such people would be prepared to carry their knowledge, commitment and principle through the Lobby at the end of debates. In such circumstances, many of the problems that we are considering in this debate about our United Kingdom constitution and devolution would never have arisen.

I should like to refer in particular to Northern Ireland. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, is not in his place, because I agreed with virtually every word of his speech. I fell out with my establishment in this place within a matter of weeks of coming to it nearly 26 years ago. I voted against the prorogation and abolition of Stormont, and then against the Anglo-Irish Agreement, because I believed that it was unacceptable interference in a successful constitution.

We set up a system, particularly when we introduced the Anglo-Irish Agreement, to involve a foreign country in the government of part of our country—that is to say, Ulster, the Six Counties. That was done without discussions with the duly elected Members of Parliament for that part of the United Kingdom. It was an abortion, and it has contributed to many of the continuing problems in this country, by which I mean England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

If, in recent years, the Government had not sought to remove a great deal of responsibility, authority and influence from local government—a misguided and wrong policy—the demand for devolution, particularly by the Opposition, would be nowhere near as strong as it is. We have contributed in part to the problems that we face. I say to those who seek devolution, some form of assembly or parliament in Scotland and Wales, that such a system will inevitably create tremendous conflict in the United Kingdom. Irrespective of whether the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun accepts it, the Liberal Democrats certainly accept that, under any form of devolved powers to Scotland and Wales, there will be a reduction in Scots and Welsh representation at Westminster.

Hon. Members cannot ignore the fact that the current per capita public expenditure offered to Scotland and Wales is likely to be reduced. If Scotland has a Parliament with the ability to raise what is called a tartan tax—I do not call it that—then the amount of money that the United Kingdom taxpayer generally and the English taxpayer in particular will be prepared to pay to Scotland will be greatly reduced.

I am also sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) is not here. He made a constructive and measured speech. I believe that it will turn out to be one of the best speeches in this important debate. Again, I found myself in considerable agreement with much of what he said.

I am one of those who believe that, unless something is wrong, we should not try to fix it; if it works, do not try to fix it. Overwhelmingly, our constitution is right for this country and the various parts of this country that comprise the United Kingdom. The UK's success internationally has come about not just because of the majority English—far from it—but because of the huge contribution and the international nature of the Scots and the Welsh. They contributed in those great battles that we fought abroad—I think particularly of the success at Rorke's drift in south Africa, which was the result of the tremendous achievements of a Welsh regiment. The Scots control economic activity throughout the world, so to set themselves up as small, independent entities in their own right does not take into account the contribution that they have made to the UK and to international affairs as a whole.

Some have talked about the need to alter our voting system, whether through the list system or the alternative vote. The list system certainly would put additional power in the hands of political parties and the establishment of those political parties. Like my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire, under a list system, I would never have been elected to this place because, rightly or wrongly, I have a mouth that God gave me and I have used it, and I will continue to use it as long as the people of Macclesfield elect me to the House. I do not always follow the advice, the hectoring and the harassment that I get from my party leadership, because I believe that I have been sent to this place not just by the Conservatives, but by the people of Macclesfield as a whole, and I greatly honour the institution of Parliament.

I look for better Government, not for more Government, costing more money. Sadly, many of the proposals that we have heard from the Opposition, particularly Her Majesty's Opposition and minority parties, involves not less or better government, but merely more government and often an additional tier of government.

I share entirely the views that have been expressed on a number of occasions in the debate about constitutional legislation. I hope that, if the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition and his party achieve office at the general election, they will make a commitment that the Committee stage of any constitutional legislation will, as it has been by precedent over the years, be taken on the Floor of the House. I have been here nearly 26 years. I remember the devolution Bills on Scotland and Wales. The Committee stages were taken on the Floor of the House and many Labour Members believed fervently that that was correct. Therefore, I hope that we shall have an assurance from Her Majesty's Opposition that constitutional Committee stages will be taken on the Floor of the House.

I shall end with the subject of Europe. The House is sovereign and must remain sovereign. I share the views of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). We must take back from Europe many of those duties and responsibilities that, inadvertently and without the sanction, or the knowing sanction, of the House, we have transferred to the European Commission. We have a great role to play not just in Europe, but in the world and we can do that only if we are in control of our destiny. Let us be proud of what we have and the history that we have achieved, and we can continue to be successful.

7.34 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): There is one thing with which I certainly agree with the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton): we should never give party leaders the power to draw up lists for Members of

Parliament. I remember it happening when I was a Member of the European Parliament. Suddenly, half the members of the Portuguese delegation disappeared because the then party leader had had a dispute with them and then removed them from the party list, so party leaders must never be given that power. However, I agree with proportional representation and I want it to be used as the system of election to both the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

I say, Welsh Assembly. I think that it is no secret to those people who know where I stand on this that I would prefer a Welsh Parliament with the same powers as the Scottish Parliament. We in Wales have long argued for that. At the end of the 1970s—I know this because I was sitting in the Press Gallery at the time—the Scottish Labour party was not as enthusiastic about devolution as the Welsh Labour party, and now it seems ironic that a Welsh Parliament should have limited powers compared with the Scottish Parliament.

However, I am prepared to compromise, because, unfortunately, public opinion in Wales is not yet strongly behind a Welsh Parliament. It is, however, strongly behind Welsh devolution. The latest opinion poll has shown clearly that more than 55 per cent. of the Welsh people are now in favour of devolution. As the argument goes on and we have a full debate on the issue, I am certain that that percentage will increase rapidly.

The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who is no longer here, lectured us on our history and suggested that perhaps some of us do not know our history, but I know that, in 1901, my illustrious predecessor in the Cynon Valley was Keir Hardie, and he argued then for Welsh home rule. There have been variations on that theme throughout the century, but, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) said, he has waited 20 years. In fact, we have all waited years, because I was also active in that devolution attempt 20 years ago. I know how hard he struggled, and it was against the odds, because some powerful voices in Wales were arguing against devolution. At that time, the people of Wales were misled. They will no longer be misled by the present party leaders, because they are clear in their view that there has to be devolution for Wales.

Much has changed since the time of Keir Hardie. Wales's traditional heavy industries of coal and steel have collapsed. There have been 18 years of Conservative rule. The valleys area, which I represent, is considered by many independent commentators to be an economic failure on an epic scale. Many men of working age are not working. Deprivation is high. The region has some of the lowest incomes in the whole of Great Britain. People in Wales are fed up with that. They have constantly voted for Labour Governments. That is the irony for the people of Wales and Scotland, who have also constantly shown their support for the Labour party.

The Welsh Office was set up as a separate Government Department in 1964. According to my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), it was almost strangled at birth by what he described as

"the jealous guardianship exercised by Whitehall departments over the principle of centralised administration".

Much criticism has focused on the democratic deficit in Welsh politics, which is highlighted by the many quangos in Wales. Their numbers have increased enormously since the Government came into office. A recent report on quangos by the Council of Welsh Districts estimated that there are about 350 quangos of various descriptions operating in Wales. Obviously, there is great concern about the accountability of those quangos, the massive powers of patronage held by the Secretary of State for Wales, who is responsible for about 1,400 appointments, and, of course, the disproportionate representation on those quangos of Conservative supporters.

A study conducted by my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) found that Conservative party members were over-represented by 40 per cent. on such quangos. Conservatives outnumber Labour members by four to one on health service trust boards in Wales. That is hardly representative of the Welsh electorate.

The 10 largest quangos in Wales spend £52 million a year on administrative costs, nearly double the amount spent three years ago. A Welsh Assembly, which had responsibility for those quangos, would devolve many of their powers to local authorities. That would improve the quality of their administration and the representation on them. That would certainly save taxpayers' money.

Let me give some examples of the democratic deficit in this place. Standing Order No. 86, which dates back to 1907, requires that all Welsh Members of Parliament should be entitled to sit on the Committees set up to scrutinise specifically Welsh legislation. During the passage of the Welsh Language Bill and the Local Government (Wales) Bill the Government suspended Standing Order No. 86. They did so despite the fact that the issues in question touched every part of Wales and involved all Welsh Members, who rightly argued that they should be able to sit on such Committees.

Interestingly enough, the Government argued that Parliament was that of the United Kingdom as a whole, and that, because Welsh Members are entitled to attend debates and vote on issues affecting England, English Members should be entitled to do the same with regard to Wales. Of course the two situations are not parallel, because Welsh Members will always be a minority in Parliament. It is the function of procedures such as those set down in Standing Order No. 86 to protect minority territorial interests in Parliament.

Then, of course, we have the Welsh Grand Committee. If ever there was a useless talking shop, that is it. Despite the fact that Welsh Members have argued against many of the Government's policies of the past 18 years and the Government are always defeated in the Welsh Grand Committee when those policies are put to the vote, they still go on to drive their policies through in the face of the majority opinion of Welsh Members.

The Government have refused to give that Committee powers to take the Committee stage of Bills relating exclusively to Wales. The Welsh Affairs Select Committee, which was set up to monitor the Welsh Office, is so stuffed with English Members that, again, the Government always have a majority on it.

Members representing Welsh constituencies are increasingly unable to hold Ministers to account at Welsh Question Time because of a concerted effort, which has become more apparent in the past year, by English Conservative Members to table questions for answer during that session. That has meant that many Welsh Members are prevented from scrutinising the actions of Welsh Office Ministers.

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

I have attempted to raise a question of great importance to my constituents during the past three occasions when we have had Welsh questions, but I have failed to do so because we have run out of time. Recently, six of the 11 questions put to the Secretary of State for Wales during that Question Time were from English Conservatives. On another two occasions, eight out of the 15 oral questions came from English Conservative Members. We have calculated that each Opposition Member only gets two opportunities a year to question Welsh Office Ministers. Parliamentary scrutiny is clearly a myth, because the majority of Welsh Members are virtually powerless to influence the decisions affecting Wales.

If it is not working, fix it. The existing arrangement is clearly not working and we must fix it.

7.44 pm

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): The Opposition's devolution proposals for Wales are regarded by the nationalists as inadequate because they do not go far enough towards Plaid Cymru's goal of independence—or, I should say, what Plaid Cymru misleadingly calls independence—for Wales. In reality, the Opposition's proposals and what Plaid Cymru calls independence are not very different. Both policies would lead to Wales becoming an insignificant and indistinguishable region of a united Europe—a spectre to which my colleagues and I on the Conservative Benches are totally opposed.

Plaid Cymru says that it wants a Welsh Parliament with full legislative and tax-raising powers. It wants a republic represented in its own right in the European Union. That is not independence. To be a truly independent state, Wales would need to have its own currency, its own central bank and a Government free to determine their own interest rates, borrowing requirement, taxation, expenditure and so on. Plaid Cymru's model denies Wales those essential freedoms.

The nationalists would have Wales join a federal Europe with its single currency and centrally determined interest rates. The convergence criteria necessary for Wales to participate would limit its powers to determine taxation and expenditure. I shall demonstrate later how, in any event, Wales would never be able to meet those convergence criteria.

Plaid Cymru's model is nothing more than one in which Wales's prominent role in the United Kingdom would be exchanged for a bit part in a united Europe. The nationalists are so obsessively anti-British in their outlook that they fail to understand that the outcome they so desire would devastate the Welsh people's standard of living, Wales's identity and its current freedom to be a proud nation within the United Kingdom.

The nationalists dwell in a dream world where their version of independence would transform Wales into a land of milk and honey. They believe that it would be subsidised by the European Union to such an extent that the problems of the real world would disappear and we would live happily ever after. It is time that they woke up.

Let us examine briefly the financial position of Wales and impose upon it some of Plaid Cymru's policies. It is, however, always difficult to assess accurately the nationalist policies as they are invariable vague and never, ever costed.

One of the myths that the nationalists are currently peddling is that an independent Wales could be subsidised from Europe in much the same way as the Republic of Ireland. That does not stand up to the barest scrutiny. First, the Irish Republic has objective 1 status—Wales does not, and would not even if it were independent. Quite simply, it does not satisfy the relevant criteria needed to achieve that status. Indeed, that status reflects a level of economic deprivation that I would not like to see inflicted on any part of Wales. Plaid Cymru's policies would, however, certainly go a long way towards causing such deprivation.

Secondly, the nationalists could not expect to separate Wales from the United Kingdom and continue to receive subventions from the United Kingdom Government. At present the nationalists do some pretty shifty double counting that gives the impression that any new European funding would be in addition to the level of expenditure by the United Kingdom Government in Wales. That is the central point which destroys their case. I shall exemplify that by referring to data contained in "Government Expenditure and Revenue" for 1994–95, which was published by the Welsh Office.

Total Government expenditure in Wales in 1994–95 was £15.6 billion. That consisted of identifiable expenditure of about £12.3 billion and non-identifiable expenditure and other expenditure, which is calculated according to Wales's share of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product. If one uses population data for that calculation, the result is an even higher figure. But the total tax raised in Wales was £9.9 billion, leaving a fiscal deficit of £5.7 billion. In order to maintain public services at existing levels, an independent Wales would need to raise £5.7 billion from its own resources every year.

In Wales, an increase of 1p on the basic rate of income tax raises £60 million. If the basic rate were raised to 100 per cent.—if every single penny earned were taken in tax—it would not clear the deficit. Every year, there would still be £1 billion of debt. Even if Welsh men and women worked for nothing, public services as we know them could not be sustained.

The yield from a 1p rise in corporation tax is £30 million, which is half the yield of a 1p rise in income tax. Corporation tax would have to be doubled to raise the additional £1 billion. Even borrowing at UK levels is not an option, as such borrowing would have to occur every year.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Richards: That would cause a cumulative structural deficit that could not be serviced or sustained.

In 1994–95, value added tax receipts in Wales were £1.7 billion. The VAT rate would have to be doubled to reduce the basic rate of direct taxation to 72p in the pound. In short, it could not be done.

Public services in Wales could not realistically be financed from Welsh resources. To do so would mean that dozens of hospitals would have to close, hundreds of schools would have to be shut, benefits would have to be slashed and roads would not be maintained. Unemployment would get out of control, which would have serious consequences in social unrest and public disorder. The economic devastation would be unprecedented.

Plaid Cymru has daily promised huge improvements, costing additional billions of pounds, to the people of Wales. Its so-called "health white paper", published two years ago, would add hundreds of millions of pounds to the bill. To meet its promises, more millions would be required for community care, and even more would be required for education. More again would be required for promoting the Welsh language, public transport, agriculture and roads. What about Plaid Cymru's promise on the linkage of state pensions to average earnings, or its promises of free television licences and increased housing, disability and unemployment benefits? Name any programme, and it has promised more money for it—by lying that a Welsh Parliament would deliver all.

It is not a matter of asking from where the money would come, but of asking who Plaid Cymru thinks it is kidding. The truth is that its objective of an independent Wales in the European Union is a non-starter—unless it is to destroy public services, such as health and education, and impose draconian taxes on workers and businesses, which would cause mass migrations and wholesale business closures.

Plaid Cymru weaves a romantic image of an independent Wales as a land of milk and honey. That image is completely false. Wales would not be an independent country but a small cog in a European wheel. It would be not a land of milk and honey but a land of bread and water. It would not be a garden of Eden, it would be the garden of Gethsemane, in which the Welsh people would be betrayed. It is not a vision for the third millennium but a reversion to the first.

Any serious observer of the House would have been dismayed by the woefully inadequate way in which the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) prepared for this most serious debate. His remarks were trivial, and he made jokes about hon. Members' comments 20 years ago. He totally failed to answer any of the fundamentally serious questions on the devolution issue. He avoided the West Lothian question, and he avoided other questions asked by my right hon. Friends on the relationship between the Executive at Westminster and an assembly in Cardiff or a parliament in Scotland.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield totally failed to say that a Secretary of State for Wales and a Cardiff Assembly would both have Executive powers in health, for example, but that a Secretary of State for Wales would not have a vote or the right to take part in a debate in a Cardiff Assembly. Which would be supreme? That is the question that he failed to answer.

7.54 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): We have heard much in this debate about Scotland and Wales, and something about Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) even suggested that we might have a Parliament of England.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: Hear, hear.

Mr. Clelland: I do not say, "Hear, Hear," to that, as I should like to speak about the English regions. Those of us who live in the northern regions believe that English regional devolution is an essential part of any debate on constitutional reform. English regional government provides part of the answer to the West Lothian question.

Over many years, we have developed a regional identity in the northern region, in co-operation with other interested parties. We live in the northernmost English region, and we know well the effects of a centralised Government based in the southernmost region. We have therefore had to take what action we can to help ourselves. As the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said, in a very interesting and helpful speech, there are cultural differences in all parts of the United Kingdom, and they should be reflected in our constitution and system of government.

In the north, we created the North of England Assembly of Local Authorities, which was the first regional representative organisation, and we created our own regional development organisation—the Northern Development Company. We do not want independence or separation. We are an English region, and we will remain so. However, we think that the Government of the United Kingdom can be more flexible and less dogmatic than they have become over the past 18 years.

The Labour party's proposals are not a threat to the Union, but an enhancement of the way in which we run our country. The Prime Minister said that we threaten a thousand years of British history. I should remind him that, 1,000 years ago, we were not the United Kingdom, let alone a democracy. We are a relatively young democracy. The full adult franchise was achieved only after a long struggle, less than 70 years ago. To pretend that we cannot improve our democracy is nonsense. Far from improving it, however, we have seen a marked deterioration in it under Tory Governments. That is what we want to change.

Before the Tory Local Government Act 1972, there were about 50,000 elected representatives in this country. Today, there are fewer than 25,000. Regional government would redress that balance, by requiring 1,000 more representatives, although the number would still be far fewer than that in 1972.

In the same period, since 1972, the number of representatives appointed by central Government to Government-controlled quangos has risen to 60,000. Those unelected bodies have taken from local government many of their powers in further education, health, urban regeneration, training and some aspects of housing. The list goes on. They now annually spend more than £50 billion of public money and run many of our public services. The total net annual transfer of public spending from elected councils to quangos is £31 billion.

It is sad that the Tory party has set itself so firmly against regional government. We know that some Conservative Members support the concept, and some of them—although they have left the Chamber—nodded in assent when it was mentioned in this debate. In the past, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Deputy Prime Minister and Lord Hailsham have all expressed their support for the idea of regional government. However, I suppose that we should not be too surprised that the Conservative party should revert to its traditional values and attempt to conserve power in the hands of the few.

The truth is that we have an over-centralised system of government, accompanied by an over-centralised economy. Political power is centred on Westminster, and economic power on the City of London. It is a system which has not well served the regions and nations of Britain. As the Prime Minister reminded us, our system is a product of ancient history; reform is long overdue.

[Mr. Clelland]

The Prime Minister may well be happy to wallow in a thousand years of history, but the people of this country prefer to look to the future. That is why the Labour party is determined to modernise our constitution, to decentralise political and economic power, to extend the franchise and to bring power closer to the people. Far from creating another tier of bureaucracy, Labour wants to extend the breadth and quality of our democracy. That is what our decentralisation policies are all about.

We have heard nothing from the Conservative party but distortions and exaggerations of our party's policy in the past few weeks and months. The latest distortion of the truth, repeated last weekend in Sedgefield by the Secretary of State for Wales, is that regional government will be costly for the taxpayer, and that advertising the post of chief executive for the north of England assembly is a demonstration of that truth. As he well knows, the assembly is simply filling a vacancy in a long-standing post. We should be grateful to the Secretary of State for Wales, however, for raising the issue of costs of administration. It is important, and should be taken into account when considering regional structures.

Despite its opposition to extending democracy to the regions, the Tory party has had no reservations about extending bureaucracy. Government offices have been set up in all the English regions, with running costs of more than £90 million a year. The cost of running the Government office of the north-east, which has a budget greater than that of any local authority in the region, exceeds £6 million a year, and the total running cost of the Government departments in the north-east alone is more than £10 million a year.

If one adds to that the thousands of appointees serving on quangos in the region—often paid thousands of pounds a year for working one or two days a week at most—and the cost of the bureaucracies that serve them, it is not difficult to see where massive savings could be made to finance any regional assembly without any need for additional taxation, while at the same time making public money and regional and local services accountable to the people they serve.

What about the politics of the matter? A classic example of how the centralised system of government works against the interests of our region was the enforced privatisation of the Port of Tyne authority, which the House agreed a few months ago. The proposals to privatise the port were opposed almost unanimously in the northern region. The Government's own consultation process attracted more than 465 responses, only four of which supported the Government's case. Bitter opposition came from business, trade unions, local government, local institutions, 83 per cent. of the region's Members of Parliament and the trust board itself.

The consultation process proved a complete waste of time. The huge weight of opinion was ignored, and the Government pressed on, but two issues relevant to today's debate emerged. First, my hon. Friends the Members for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) and for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and I, having been refused an audience with the Secretary of State for Transport, were invited into the presence of Lord Goschen, an unelected peer. The people of this country may be surprised to learn that three Members of Parliament, representing the area involved and elected by the people of the area to speak on issues affecting their lives, were told by someone who holds his position only because of some unknown activity of his forefathers and who, to our knowledge, had not even visited Tyneside, that he knew better than we did—and, what is more, better than all the local representations to the contrary—what was good for the people and businesses in our region.

The second was the sight of scores of Tory Members of Parliament, mostly from the south of England, pouring through the Lobby to carry the Government's dogma into legislation, in the face of massive opposition from the people of the area. There is no relevance to the national interest in central Government forcing such policies on local communities, for no other reason than to satisfy central dogma.

The Prime Minister has argued that our proposals imperil the Union. If, because of some disastrous turn of events, the Conservatives were to be re-elected for yet another term, it has been suggested that the democratic deficit in our nation will cause deep dismay and further resentment, leading to dangerous and turbulent unrest in parts of our society, which will itself endanger the Union. If that is true, then our proposals, far from endangering the Union, will preserve it.

Giving proper expression to our varied communities and enabling them to pursue their own priorities for their own local services; devolving the power to democratic and accountable assemblies, in regions that are large enough to have some political and economic clout and which can demonstrate a measure of social and economic cohesion—this is how we will provide a system of government that will allow for innovation and diversity, which can only be healthy, socially and economically.

We in the north look forward to the opportunity to restore trust and confidence in our democracy and to take our region into the 21st century, optimistic that life will get a whole lot better. Listening to the debate today, it is clearer than ever that we need a Labour Government to achieve that.

8.3 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I suggest that the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) looks up Viscount Goschen's noble antecedent, who was the First Lord of the Admiralty, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Lord Chancellor. He had an interesting political career, sitting on the Liberal as well as the Tory Benches; he was quite a statesman in his day.

In a debate on devolution, there are certain inescapable consequences of politicians stirring up issues that might not necessarily be to the ultimate advantage of the people they represent. This could be such a debate. I believe that the Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish people working together make a very good team. I hope that nothing we do in the House will affect that. In every company, north or south of the border into Scotland or Wales or in Northern Ireland, one finds people of all the nationalities that make up the United Kingdom working happily and harmoniously together.

I spent the best and probably the happiest part of my childhood in the most northern part of Scotland, in Caithness in the constituency of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), the one-time leader of the Social Democratic party.

Mr. McAllion: Were you fabricated at Dounreay?

Mr. Hargreaves: Very close to Dounreay.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will excuse me for saying that I believe that, viewed from Caithness, Westminster is a long way away. Anyone watching television and seeing things happening at Westminster rather than in Edinburgh or elsewhere in Scotland will find it difficult not to get the idea that government is becoming remote from the people of Scotland.

I therefore congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and his predecessors on their efforts to ensure that the Scottish Office has been devolved to Scotland, and that there is greater accountability to the Scottish people through the Scottish Grand Committee and examination of what the Government and the Scottish Office do. I want that process to continue, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend will in due course be developing plans to make sure that it does.

If we believe strongly in the Union—as I said, I have seen it from the northernmost part—we must not regard the House as mere bricks and mortar. If we want people in Dunnet Head in Caithness, in Wales, or in Ulster to feel part of the Union, we should not hesitate to move various aspects of these bricks and mortar to make the Union come alive. I should like to see Parliament being opened up in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the years ahead. I see no practical obstacle to that. I think it is a policy that this party could happily adopt in due course.

If we want the Union to work, we must make it work. We must make everyone feel part of it. I feel strongly that the formal Scottish Parliament advocated by the Labour party will lead to separatism, bitterness and reprisals. Labour's proposals are ill thought out and wrong.

Worse than that, in a Europe of regions, Scotland would become just another region, not a nation within a Union which has clout because it contributes to the European Union budget. It would be caught on the hook of handout grants, on which it would depend. It would give Brussels the opportunity to bypass the UK Parliament, just at a time when Scotland should be using UK weight and influence to take a lead in reforming or abolishing the common fisheries policy, in defending and promoting its heritage in, for example, the whisky industry and salmon culture.

Scotland would inevitably be treated as a region and rolled over by Brussels, its interest sacrificed, through lack of clout, for a paltry regional grant. Scotland would lose the last genuinely democratic means of voicing opposition to a federalist bureaucracy, and any opportunity to change that bureaucracy.

Mrs. Fyfe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hargreaves: No. I have 10 minutes, and I shall therefore not give way.

If the Labour party does not address the West Lothian question, and does not clarify its taxation policy for a Scottish Parliament or a Scottish Assembly, we shall accuse it of depending for its majority, undemocratically, on a surfeit of Scottish Members spending predominantly English taxpayers' money, while English Members have no say in the expenditure of money in Scotland. That would be a mockery, and a travesty of democracy.

Every time a patient dies unexpectedly or while awaiting treatment in an English hospital—every day, every week; drip, drip, drip—we shall remind the public in England that the Labour party is holding power because of a surfeit of Scottish Members of Parliament who are spending two and a half times as much English taxpayers' money on someone in Scotland as on a patient in Birmingham. If there was a rail accident or a road accident, the case would be more dramatic: we would be able to say, with justification, that, if the money had been spent fairly and proportionately in England, that accident might not have happened.

That form of representation could not survive. I ask Labour Members to think for a moment—would English Members not come under pressure to revisit the subject of defence and the Scottish bases that many Labour Members have fought so hard for? What future could they see for Faslane, Rosyth and Lossiemouth? I think that there would be very little future for them.

Should the Labour party be in a position to implement its policy by undemocratic means, I guarantee that we shall hound it out of England as an undemocratic party of minorities, never standing up for the majority English interest. It would be a party of ethnic ghettos. In local government, it has made such ghettos of our great cities, for purely political advantage. It would be a party of minorities—never the party of an English majority in England. We shall never let the people of England forget the contempt with which the Labour party treats an English electorate.

8.12 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): We have just heard the personification of the English backlash. I can tell the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. Hargreaves) that there is a considerable body of opinion in Scotland that would be happy for Trident to be taken from the River Clyde and located in his constituency.

As he was talking about Parliament being reassembled throughout the country, I had an image of the American gentleman who dismantled London bridge some years ago and reassembled it somewhere in the middle of Texas. If the hon. Gentleman was in earlier, he will have heard me quote to the Prime Minister the statistics showing that the overwhelming majority of the people of Scotland regard the Tory party as an anti-Scottish party. He has given a perfect example why.

I am tempted to ask: is this it? This is a debate on the issue that will transcend the general election campaign. For the past two and a half hours, there have not even been enough hon. Members on the Conservative Benches to make a football team. If that is the gang who will defend the United Kingdom against all the dangers that beset it, the game is probably up already.

I do not know whether he is familiar with the phrase, but I would describe the Prime Minister's speech as cauld kale het up. He was trying to return to the glories of the

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

last election campaign. We have heard that once too often now. All that was missing was the declaration of "a thousand years of British history".

When the Prime Minister talks about a thousand years of British history, I remember the British history that I used to be asked to study at St. Andrew's university, which was English history—they just called it British history. When the Prime Minister talks about the thousand years of British history, he is, for the most part, talking about English history. A former Speaker once gave a ruling that this House was a continuance of the English Parliament, and should not be considered a separate entity after the Act of Union.

The leader of the Labour Party criticised the Prime Minister, wittily describing him as Ethelred the Unready. He then listed, quite properly, some of the changes that have been made to constitutional arrangements in recent times. It was significant, however, that he did not include the independence of Ireland in the 1920s or the 50 countries that have become independent of this place since the second world war.

The revealing aspect of the exchanges between the leader of the Labour party and the Prime Minister was how much they were playing to an English gallery. There was no doubt that the Prime Minister's audience was not in central Scotland or mid Wales, but in middle England. He wants to wrap himself in the Union Jack and seize the patriotic card.

When they have an exchange, they fling at each other the final argument about which of them has policies that are more dangerous to the integrity of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister says to the Leader of the Opposition, "You're going to break up the United Kingdom." The Leader of the Opposition says to the Prime Minister, "No, no. It's your policy that will break up the United Kingdom."

Is it not possible that both are right, and that the centre of gravity has moved so far in Scotland that resistance to change will break up the United Kingdom, and the concession of devolution will also lead to independence for Scotland? We can conclude that those on both Front Benches think that independence is very likely—they are merely bickering about how we shall get there.

The Prime Minister's attitude will alienate people in Scotland, but they will also be entitled to question the trustworthiness of the Labour party on this issue. After 20 years of arguing for a policy, I should that thought that Labour would have come up with a convincing answer to the so-called West Lothian question. The leader of the Labour party said today that the question had never been raised about Northern Ireland. That is not so. I ask the House to consider this quotation:

"I am sure the House will agree that there is an apparent lack of logic, for example, about steel, when Northern Ireland can, and presumably will, swell the Tory ranks tonight, when we have no power to vote on questions about steel in Northern Ireland"—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1965; Vol. 711, c. 1560.]

That was not a Labour Back Bencher or a Tory Back Bencher, but the then leader of the Labour party, the late Harold Wilson, at Prime Minister's questions.

The point is not that we cannot have a state with constitutional anomalies, but that the anomalies depend on the good will of all. We have heard enough from the Tory benches to know that they would wish to exact revenge if the problem of the West Lothian question became a reality.

The fact that the Labour party has not prepared for that and come up with convincing answers—or even some answer, as the Liberal Democrats have—is a sign of its lack of preparation on the subject, and perhaps a lack of conviction. If Labour Members wanted to argue for the policy, surely an arrangement such as the sacrifice of a few Members of Parliament, as the Liberal Democrats suggest, or some other would have been worth devising.

The leader of the Labour party had great fun with the Prime Minister—quite successfully, I thought—quoting back old comments, and asking why those opinions were no longer valid. I should like bring back an old quotation from the late John Smith, former leader of the Labour party, who said in the *Daily Record* of 9 July 1992:

"The Labour party must keep the Scottish issue at the centre of the political stage. That's why we are campaigning for a multi-option referendum."

When the Leader of the Opposition told my hon. Friend tha Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) that a multi-option referendum, giving people a valid choice between independence, devolution and the status quo, was SNP policy, he seemed to forget that it was also the policy of his predecessor—a policy that the present leader, with some help from his Scottish Front Benchers, has managed to tear up.

The key issue in this debate is sovereignty. One of the few issues on which the leader of the Labour party and the Prime Minister agreed was the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament. In contrast, I agree with the right hon. Members for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) that sovereignty lies with the Scottish people. Why is that important? Unless we accept that that is where sovereignty lies, any assembly or devolved parliament will be subject to pressure, or even abolition, from the Conservatives.

There has been a debate between the Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland about who would abolish a Scottish Assembly at some time in the future, and under what circumstances. The Secretary of State for Scotland said that that would not happen; then he modified that comment, to say that it might happen after a referendum.

That tells us that a hostile incoming Tory Government would squeeze dry a Scottish Assembly—either through outright abolition or through gradual abolition. They would certainly do to a Scottish Assembly what they are now doing to Scottish councils throughout the land: they would squeeze the Assembly's expenditure and put it into an impossible situation.

There is an arrogance about the Tory case. The Secretary of State for Scotland made a speech a few weeks ago in Scotland that is known in common parlance as the "Defamation of Arbroath". He said that we do not need changes in Scotland, because Scotland was the fastest growing economy in Europe. Scotland is not even close to being the fastest growing economy in Europe—Ireland is. Ireland has been so over the past few years, and is forecast to remain so over the next three. That is why the House of Commons Library says that, by 2000, Ireland will overtake the United Kingdom in gross domestic product per capita. What a shock that will be for the Tory party.

I have heard the fiscal threats from the Tory Benches. They should consider the parliamentary answer from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 13 January. It shows a surplus in Scottish accounts of £27,000 million since 1979. If the Labour party can be accused of wanting to hang on to Scotland for parliamentary seats, surely we can say that the Tory party wants to hang on to Scotland for our resources, including our oil, gas, land, fish, water—the vested interest that the Tory party always represents.

The proposition that an independent Scotland would not be viable is absurd. If the proper share of Scottish resources in the North sea were added to the Scottish gross domestic product, an independent Scotland would become the eighth most prosperous country in the industrialised world. For the benefit of the Labour Front-Bench team, I can say that the United Kingdom is the 17th. The difference for an independent Scotland would be like the difference between being at the bottom of the first division, heading for relegation, and being in the premier league.

The debate has shown the bankruptcy not of Scotland or Wales, but of the Westminster Parliament and the two parties that dominate it.

8.21 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): I am the Member of Parliament for Chingford, which is a wholly English constituency, but, like so many of my constituents, I am a mixture of various parts of the kingdom that make up this United Kingdom. I was born in Scotland; my father was educated and lived much of his life in Scotland and, but for ill health, would have died in Scotland. My mother's family hail from Ireland.

The debate is a debate on the United Kingdom. Many of our constituents represent a mixture of all the nations and have benefited as a result. Many of my constituents who are Scots send money back to Scotland for their parents or relations and visit Scotland regularly. Today's debate is not, and should never be, a debate of English versus Scots or Scots versus Welsh or English. That would run against the history and success of the United Kingdom, which depends on the blending of the kingdoms—harnessing their strengths, while keeping their individuality.

Mr. Wigley: As in the case of Europe.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman intervenes, but there are serious differences—the process may or may not take place, but linguistically, legally and culturally, there are some significant differences. It has taken hundreds of years to blend the kingdoms; it may take thousands of years for the sort of blending of which the hon. Gentleman spoke.

I was intrigued by the speech of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). I came here expecting to hear a strong espousal of what is clearly going to be a serious plank in the Labour party's manifesto for the next election. If the right hon. Gentleman and other Labour Members are to stand on that platform, surely it is worth laying out in detail exactly what it is and how it will work. But we heard nothing of any great substance from the right hon. Gentleman. He merely skirted around the main arguments.

I can imagine that last night the right hon. Gentleman had a rehearsal with the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who would have said, "Tony, you must begin with a bit of knockabout." He would then have told the right hon. Gentleman, "Make it a bit of fun and have a go at the Government Front-Bench ranks. Pull out one or two of their quotes and have some fun with them, but be careful, because the Government may get you on the changes that you have gone through over the past few years. Do a bit of that and then quickly move on to the Lords, where you can launch a hard attack because everyone knows that there is something wrong with the Lords. It's strange that, whatever we propose, we're never prepared to go the whole way on its proposals. Still, stay on that subject for a while, then quickly slide into your peroration and sit down." And that is exactly what happened.

We heard nothing of substance, although the constitution is meant to be a strong plank of their manifesto. If I were a Scots Labour Back Bencher I would wonder why the right hon. Member for Sedgefield did not lay out the case for the proposals that he and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) are making. There is a powerful argument to be made, and if he wants the people of Britain to vote Labour, surely he should be setting up the case that Labour Back Benchers want to advance. But the argument was not advanced; it was skirted around. I wonder why. There are serious issues to be discussed. I am intrigued as to why the right hon. Gentleman did not tackle it.

We have heard a lot about the tartan tax being an imposition on Scots people, who will pay more tax. Earlier, I heard the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) say from a sedentary position that the Scots may want that. Let us assume that he is correct. It has been mooted from the Opposition Front Bench that the tax will not always be increased, and that it could be decreased—there could be a reduction in income tax. The question for my constituents in Chingford is: at whose cost?

If the overall burden of tax in Scotland is reduced and the overall level of tax in Britain does not drop with it, who will have to bear the burden? Either in England or in an amalgamation of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, certain tax rates will have to rise. If a decision is handed over to someone in Scotland, others here may pay the penalty. It is an English question. It is a question about what happens to my constituents, but it was not addressed. We must address not just tax rises in Scotland, but the possibility of tax rises in England. None of those questions was answered. That is consistent with the position of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield.

The hon. Member for Hamilton, the shadow Secretary of Scotland, makes decisions, comes up with proposals and debates them among the Labour party in Scotland; suddenly a problem develops in England, and the proposals are changed quickly. The position of William Wallace was mentioned earlier—it was suggested that he was dismembered and his parts pushed around the United Kingdom. It is the same with the Scots Labour party—its head is in Islington and its heart is in Edinburgh. It stays like that: whenever the hon. Gentleman wants to make a change, he is slapped down. What is important is not what the Scots Labour Members want, but what the people in Islington want. I wonder how acceptable that is to hon. Members representing Scottish constituencies.

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

I am concerned about the way in which the debate has proceeded. It seems to have been a ragbag of emotions, driven in part here in England by Charter 88 and by a collection of separatists and those who total independence for some of the other nations. They use the Labour party and the Liberals as their dupes, inviting them to come along to a halfway house to eventual independence.

The argument has not been about the need for change; we accept, and must always accept, that in the United Kingdom there is always a need for change—that is the purpose of our constitution: it must change. The question involves what changes are made, and how fast, and what would go with the grain of the system rather than against it. But what drives the Labour party is the fact that it has been in opposition for 17 years. It wants to get its hands on the levers of power and pull them. The Labour party's concern at never having achieved that aim has led to its anger and its belief that there is something fundamentally wrong with the system. Perhaps what is fundamentally wrong is the Labour party's inability to appeal to the British public and get them to elect it—or perhaps that has never really concerned them.

We argue endlessly that there is a need for change. I know what it is like to argue in constitutional debates on the Floor of the House. I experienced the frustration of opposing the Government during the Maastricht debates. I put an argument that I believed to be right and that later proved to be the case. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) will remember the debate on the social chapter. Since then it has been proved that we have no real opt-out. I still believe that, but the Government did not listen and pressed ahead. Of course I recognise the frustrations of the Opposition, but that does not necessarily mean that the system is absolutely wrong and needs total change.

There are answers to the West Lothian question, but the halfway house solution proposed by the Opposition is not the answer. There are two possible solutions. The first is to change the entire structure of the United Kingdom and make it a federal system. If people want that, let us debate making the United Kingdom federal. The alternative is independence for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland if those nations want independence, but that is a big debate. We cannot fiddle around with the existing system, but that is exactly what the Labour party is proposing. If we do that, we shall end up in a mess. We should debate properly a complete change of the system, which is what must happen. When my right hon. Friend says that if we do that there will be no going back, he is right. We cannot go back and stick it all together again. We shall have to deal with what we have then, and in reality we shall be faced with big decisions.

There is a need for change. Anyone who has sat in this place for four years knows that. Statutory instruments have poured through, and Parliament no longer scrutinises legislation properly. That is a cause of frustration to Conservative Back Benchers as well as the Opposition. The system needs changing and Europe is deeply part of Parliament's failure properly to scrutinise. All that must change. There must be proper debate and change to our system, but I question the proposals from the Opposition, which represent a complete break from the historical trend of gradual change. They will ultimately throw the whole system over. A proper debate means dealing with that.

8.31 pm

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): Today, the Government have displayed delusions of empire. We are hearing the last of the Englishmen trying to hold on to the last of the empire as they see it. They have never considered Scotland as a separate nation, but as a region that they govern. I remind them that the United Kingdom is a union of nations, not an agreement somewhere along the line only 290 years ago—not 1,000 years ago, when Ethelred the Unready was on the throne of England. He did not even rule over the whole of England as we now understand it. Ethelred may have been unready, but in Scotland the Conservative party is unelectable. There have now been 10 elections since the Conservatives had a majority in Scotland.

The treaty of union in 1707 was a marriage of convenience, and an arranged marriage at that. There were riots in the streets of Edinburgh and, as now, the people of Scotland were not consulted. That is why there is so much resentment. The Scottish people were brought into a marriage that they did not necessarily want, and they have never got over it. For a marriage to succeed, it has to change. It cannot continue with one partner having all the say and the other partner having none. The other partner is now demanding some of the say.

This Parliament is not sovereign. The wishes of the people of the nations of this Parliament are sovereign. The West Lothian question has a simple answer. It is not a question for the Scots or the Welsh, but for the people of England and how they wish to conduct their home affairs. In the most recent referendum the majority of Scots wanted to manage their own home affairs. They still believe that. If the people of England want to manage their home affairs, that is fine. I have absolutely no objection to that.

Day on day, the Government tell us that the Scottish Grand Committee handles Scottish affairs. If they want a simple solution, the English should have their own Grand Committee. That would be logical. We are being trailed around the length and breadth of Scotland month in, month out, week in, week out by a Tory rump. The Tories have only 10 elected Members in Scotland. We are debating subjects mainly of their choosing and we cannot vote on them.

The Scottish people have no say in that talking shop. That circus is being dragged around and the Scots are being told to listen. It is just not on any longer. The Scots will have their Parliament. The Government can be dragged to the table kicking and screaming, or they can come of their own volition, but they can be sure that the United Kingdom as they know it will not continue for very much longer. If they want to destroy it, that is entirely up to them, but the Scots are determined to have their own Parliament.

The terms of that Parliament are clearly set out by the Scottish Convention in partnership with the Liberals and many Scottish institutions, including the Churches and the trade unions. It will provide more representation for women. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I am not a great believer in quotas, but I support equal representation.

Some might consider it a travesty to reflect that, in the entire history of the Parliament, only 23 women from Scotland have ever sat on these Benches. I make no apology for saying that 50 per cent. of the seats in

Edinburgh will be occupied by women. Quite frankly, it is about time that that happened. One of the great disadvantages of this Parliament for women from Scotland is the distance involved. Every week we have to travel 400, 450 or 500 miles, and the domestic arrangements of most women do not allow for that.

A Scottish Parliament would bring democracy to the people of Scotland. For the past 17 years, policies that no one wants and for which no one voted have been foisted on the people of Scotland. In my constituency, they have resulted in the loss of some 30,000 manufacturing jobs.

Every month I attend Scottish Questions. Apparently, all the questions relating to Scottish affairs have to be answered in one hour each month. Quite frankly, it is a lottery. Month after month, we put our names on the list and month after month they do not appear. The House is inundated with English Members representing English constituencies who ask questions that clearly have absolutely nothing to do with their own constituencies.

It is a matter of democracy and the representation of the people of Scotland being just that. Scottish people do not want policies foisted on them from afar, but the policies that they want being implemented near them. Most of my constituents have never seen this place. I can count on two hands the number who have visited me here in the past seven years: It is just too far for them to come, and they do not associate it with themselves. They want a Parliament that they can see and in which they can take part. They want a Parliament that they can visit and that will introduce policies that are relevant to them.

8.39 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Many of us who have attended the majority of the debate will leave the House with a profound sense of disappointment that we did not get a single answer to any of the key questions that were put to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). As my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) said, there was nothing on tax and, of course, nothing on the West Lothian question. I hope that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) will produce more answers, but I do not expect he will.

The Labour party spin doctors at the media centre at Millbank will have had an opportunity by now to work through the speech of the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, and they will have realised that he was clearly outgunned by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Perhaps they will come up with an answer to the mysterious West Lothian question, unlike the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams), who said that the West Lothian question was not a question for Scotland, but a question for England.

The Leader of the Opposition treated us to a display of arrogant sophistry. He might have got away with that in a school debate, and if he had been speaking at a debating competition between Fettes school and Hamilton academy, I would have given him some points; but this is the House of Commons, which represents the British people and they cannot be treated with such arrogance as the right hon. Gentleman displayed tonight. Our democracy works in the normal way, in that all the parties set out their stalls at the general election, but the 1997 general election will be unique, in that the main opposition party—the Labour party—is not setting out its stall on tax, on Europe or on the constitution of this country. How can the people decide which way to vote if one party does not set out its stall to be judged by the electorate?

I am glad to see the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) back in the Chamber, because the people of the north will need to make a judgment about whether to support an elected regional assembly for the north, which is what the hon. Gentleman calls for. Before they vote, however, they should be told what a regional assembly for the north means, and in his speech today, the hon. Gentleman made no reference to what was involved and what it would cost. Let me tell the electorate of the north of England that the Conservative view is perfectly clear: we do not want an elected regional assembly for the north of England.

Let me warn the people of the north of England what the Labour party is up to. Labour is using an organisation called the North of England Assembly of Local Authorities as a way of promoting directly elected regional government in the north of England. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that assembly, which was set up with the perfectly justifiable aim of being a forum for local authorities in the area to discuss matters of common concern. It was not set up to promote regional government or to pilot the north of England as a candidate for regional government.

However, the advertisement in *The Guardian* for the successor to the secretary of that organisation asks for a "director" at double the salary that the previous incumbent of the post received. That new director would have the duties of promoting regional government and piloting the region for regional government in England. That is a disgrace. The purpose of that regional assembly has not been put to the people of the north of England at all. The assembly now has a budget of £250,000 a year, so every council tax payer in the north of England makes a contribution to the Labour party's propaganda campaign. The assembly was set up with good intentions, but has now been turned into a Trojan horse for Labour plans for devolution in this country.

The other aspect of regional government that Opposition Members have not explained is the extensive powers that it will have. It is proposed that the elected regional assembly will take over the role of the Government office for the north-east and the £0.5 billion budget that that Department controls. It will take over most aspects of the lives of the people of the north of England. Let us hear exactly what is proposed—this information comes from the Labour party's own document.

The assembly will take over matters such as business development, industrial planning, strategic planning, environment and pollution controls, purity of rivers, transport in conurbations, railway subsidies, housing and regeneration, the local sports council and arts council and the funding of further education colleges. In addition, it will move in on health arrangements, because one of the preconditions of the assembly is that it will have a right to be consulted on all allocations of health service cash and all capital expenditure in the local health authority. It will, for example, have a say in whether my new local hospital at Hexham is built.

Who will control that assembly? Sadly, we in the north of England have an unenviable reputation for local government waste, cronyism, favours to friends and

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

sometimes outright corruption. Decades in power for the Labour party have made many Labour councillors arrogant about their voters. After being in power for so many years, the only people whom Labour councillors have to fear are usually those on their own side.

Mr. McAllion: Look at the sleaze on your own Benches.

Mr. Atkinson: The hon. Gentleman should wait a little while.

Regional government will be about jobs for the boys and costly additional bureaucracy. The people who run it will seek to abolish some of our existing local government structures. One of the preconditions of regional government has been that we remove one tier of local government in the north. In Northumberland, it will not be the Labour-controlled county council that goes, but our district councils. True local government will be removed from the people of Northumberland in order to give jobs to the Labour boys.

Let us look at some of those Labour boys who might well get jobs. Last Saturday, *The Journal*, Newcastle's morning newspaper, carried three stories in a single edition on this subject. A headline on page 2 read "Police quiz council chief", and the ensuing story told how an elected councillor was being quizzed about a possible expenses fraud. On page 7, the headline was: "Councillor to liquidate print firm". The first paragraph stated:

"A print firm whose links with a crisis-hit North union were at the centre of a probe is set to go into liquidation, it emerged last night."

The business is run by a local councillor. A senior member of a Tyneside local authority put his business into liquidation after it was revealed that his girl friend, who works for the union, was giving him £1,000-worth of work a week. He had also been working for local Labour-controlled authorities.

On page 26, there was another story about the Labour party.

Mr. Clelland: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are supposed to be debating the constitution. Is the way in which the hon. Gentleman is proceeding in order?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I have been following the hon. Member's argument and seeking to perceive the connection which I hope he will shortly make. Hon. Members will know that Adjournment debates are, of their nature, fairly wide and the constitution is a fairly wide subject anyway, but I trust that the hon. Gentleman will be able to satisfy me and the House.

Mr. Atkinson: I can satisfy you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point I am trying to make is that, sadly, elected regional government in the north-east will be run by Labour, because the Labour party has exclusively controlled local politics in the area for many decades. It will be run as a system of jobs for the boys, and I am pointing out the sort of boys who will be getting the jobs.

The third story in that edition of *The Journal* stated:

"A Labour Party official has been banned from attending party meetings after he was accused of assaulting a colleague."

Those are the sort of people of whom the population of the north of England should beware. That is what regional government will mean: jobs for the boys and extra cost. It is no wonder that local business and local people do not want that form of devolution.

Members of Parliament from the north will be put in a unique position if the Labour party's constitutional reforms go through. Members of Parliament representing north-east seats will have no say in what goes on Scotland, no say in what goes on in Wales and precious little say in what goes on in their own constituency, because most of the powers that affect our constituents will have been removed and devolved to an elected assembly.

8.48 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am grateful to be called at the fag end of the debate to give the view of my party, although it's view has been pretty well attacked by some of the speakers, not least by the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) in the claptrap that he spoke about the economic position of Wales. I am sorry that he is not in his seat at the moment.

It is unfortunate, not only that that is the case, but that Wales has not been represented on the Front Benches during the debate. I would have expected the Secretary of State for Wales to be directly involved in a debate as important as this, and I expected the main spokesman on the Opposition Front Bench to be from Wales. Indeed, a week ago today, the Leader of the House said that he expected that the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales would be the ones to participate in the debate. I believe that the people of Wales are heartily sick of the way in which the needs of Wales are marginalised within the Chamber; that is one of the most pressing reasons why we need constitutional change.

During the Prime Minister's opening speech, I put it to him that he appeared to believe that there was only one alternative to the status quo—which is unacceptable in Wales—that alternative being full self-government, because the Conservative party was totally and unreasonably unwilling to consider any compromise. He answered, "We shall give greater powers to the Welsh Grand Committee." In fact, he said "We have given greater powers to the Welsh Grand Committee," although Welsh Members have not seen them.

That Grand Committee is incapable of taking any decision on behalf of the people of Wales; it is a talking shop par excellence. It does not make the Executive answerable to Members from Wales, and it does not advance a Welsh agenda or formulate policy. If that is the only offering that the Conservative Government are willing to make, it is little wonder that the people of Wales believe that they have no alternative but to seek full self-government for our country.

During recent years, the failure of the existing political system to give us democracy in Wales has been exacerbated. We do not have democracy in Wales, for the most basic of reasons. As the Prime Minister said in his opening speech, he accepts and recognises that Wales and Scotland are nations in their own right. Being nations in

our own right, we have slightly different priorities, values and expectations from those in England. They may be better or worse, according to the eyes of the perceiver, but they are different. Those are manifested most in the political representation that has come through from Wales to the Chamber during the 140 years since there has been some form of democracy.

It has been said—it bears repeating—that never, in any single election during that period, has Wales elected a majority of Tory Members of Parliament. Following some elections, there has not been a single Tory Member from Wales. At the moment, with a Tory Government in power, only six of the 38 Members from Wales are in the Conservative party, and three of those have majorities of fewer than 1,000 votes.

Probably, following the general election in the next two or three months, once again there will not be a single Tory Member from Wales, yet we may find ourselves governed by a Conservative party, whose values, priorities and policies are totally out of line with the needs of Wales and the wishes of the Welsh people. That is not democracy.

People argue that we are seeking an additional tier of government. That tier of government is to a large extent already in place. We have a Welsh Office, 80 attendant quangos and a Secretary of State with responsibility for £7,000 million of public expenditure, but we do not have democratic answerability for the way in which the policies that decide how those resources are used are enacted.

The past four Secretaries of State for Wales have not even been Welsh constituency Members of Parliament. They have been sent in as governors-general to run our country. The origin of the Secretary of Stateship for Wales was the idea of having a member of the Cabinet who could speak up from Welsh experience, knowing our Welsh needs, and who could articulate our hopes and fears. Instead, we now have a commercial traveller on behalf of the Cabinet in Wales, peddling Tory policies from London, not representing Wales in Cabinet.

The system that was supposed to safeguard Wales has broken down, yet the House is not willing to give an inch to allow any variation in policy formulation to meet the diverse needs of Wales. When the Welsh Language Act 1993, the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 and other Acts were going through their stages, the Committees that considered those Bills were packed with English constituency Members of Parliament, who knew nothing about what was being debated and did not have to live with the consequences of the legislation.

We want a parliament for Wales as a first step to Wales becoming a self-governing country within the European Union. In its first stage, the parliament would take over all the functions under the Welsh Office with full law-making powers, and all taxes collected in Wales would be aggregated to a Welsh Treasury Department. That parliament should also have direct links with the European Union, because we know by now how many of the decisions that affect Wales daily are taken far away in Europe, not here in Westminster.

If we have a real, effective voice for Wales in the European Union, we can expect to obtain a better deal than the pathetic bargain that has come from the representation that London has given for Wales in Brussels.

This week, the Library of the House of Commons released figures showing that, in 1996, for the first time, the gross domestic product per capita of the Irish Republic overtook that of the United Kingdom as a whole. Can you imagine that being the case, Madam Deputy Speaker, if Ireland had still been governed from Westminster, and can you imagine the people of Ireland ever wanting to turn the clock back to those days when they were dying of famine?

The people of the Ireland have been able to build up their economy, first by virtue of the fact that they have control of their legislation, and secondly because they have been able to work with the grain of Europe to obtain the best deal that they can for their people. That has not happened for Wales. Ireland has been able to get 10 times as many resources per capita from the European Union than has Wales.

The people of Wales—especially the farmers of Wales, considering what has happened with the BSE during the past year, during which they have paid a price for the way in which the Government have failed to represent us—need a real parliament.

My sadness in hearing the opening speech by the Leader of the Opposition was that he made hardly any reference to Wales. There was certainly no justification for giving Scotland a parliament, albeit with inadequate powers but at least full law-making powers over some subjects, and giving Wales an assembly with no primary law-making powers whatever. That is not good enough.

We need a parliament that can make a difference in matters such as education and health, housing and employment—the matters that are important to the people of Wales. We are seeking a parliament, not just a building on the banks of the Taff instead of on the banks of the Thames so that we can say, "We have a symbol," but a powerhouse of a parliament, which can make a difference in the everyday lives of the ordinary people of Wales—their education and health, jobs and housing.

Our great fear is that, if we get only an assembly with no primary law-making powers, in five years' time we may have a Redwood-led or Portillo-led Government who will try to bring in right-wing legislation to privatise education or health. It may not apply to Scotland, where there will be a parliament with law-making powers, but it will apply to Wales, and our assembly will be nothing more than a glorified moaning shop, which cannot make any difference.

In conclusion, I make an appeal: when we have that referendum, let us ensure that it is fair. It should be a consultative referendum that gives all the people of Wales the right to express their preference. The options should be, first, full self-government in Europe; secondly, a parliament with law-making powers, rather than full self-government; thirdly, the Labour party's suggestion of an elected assembly; and, fourthly, the status quo for Tories who believe that nothing can be done to improve the situation. Those four alternatives should be on the ballot paper in a referendum, if that referendum is to be meaningful. If they are not, the referendum will not be worth the paper it is written on.

That is a challenge to the incoming Labour Government after the election. I say on behalf of the overwhelming majority of the people of Wales across

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

party lines that Wales will not be treated as a second-class nation. We demand a parliament of our own, with real powers that will make a difference.

8.58 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North–West): May I just say to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), and to the hon. Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams), who spoke before him, that I see a different world from them. Scotland and Wales are not second-class nations. I spent six years of my life teaching in Edinburgh and an entire year and a half on the Alec Douglas-Home constitutional committee looking at those issues. I also go, with the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, around Wales.

Those countries are transformed. They did not need a Scottish or Welsh Parliament; they have had an English Parliament, an English Government, a Scottish Office and a Welsh Office, which have transformed those countries. The Welsh pits would have declined anyway, but the Welsh economy has been transformed by the injection of Government money and by the incentives that have brought in far eastern investment to Wales and to Scotland. When I go to Scotland now, I see a road network that has been transformed.

The hon. Member for Paisley, North asked what the English want. The English in my area, Yorkshire, and in the north-east are fed up with politicians from Wales and Scotland going on like those were. The answer to the hon. Lady is that Scotland would not have got those resources had it not been part of the United Kingdom. Wales and Scotland would not have got those resources without Secretaries of State in the Cabinet fighting those battles for them.

As we saw when we studied this matter way back in 1968–69—people did not like it being said then, but I shall say it again now—the people of Wales and Scotland have had a disproportionate amount of public expenditure, compared with those in Yorkshire. It is about time that people south of the border, in England, said, "Okay, you want to go your own way but there are consequences and costs. We do not want to continue putting our taxpayers' money into your countries." Had independence been achieved, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon wanted, in 1969–70, Scotland and Wales would no longer be in such a successful position. They have gained an enormous amount from being part of the United Kingdom.

I wanted primarily to deal with regional government. Those who are calling loudest for regional assemblies and parliaments are politicians. This whole constitutional debate, which will potentially waste massive amounts of time if the Labour party forms the next Government, will distract people to a meaningless subject. The proposed constitutional changes have nothing to do with things that matter to ordinary people. They will not improve the economy. The House of Lords might need reforming, but that does not affect ordinary people and their daily lives. To most people, those are relatively trivial matters. What people want is success and a better standard of living, not theory.

Politicians want devolution for their own vested interests. The Labour party in Scotland must somehow head off the nationalists, so it must offer something. In Wales, it is the same sort of political trade-off, and the rest of us must suffer as a consequence. As a result of that nonsense and the refusal to deal honestly with what is now called the West Lothian question—the logical solution to which is to reduce the number of Scottish Members of Parliament in Westminster—the Labour party has had to come up with an incredible fudge: the so-called "regionalising" of Britain.

For 1,000 years, England has been a united kingdom—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] There has been so much rotten history in tonight's debate. England has been united for 1,000 years. Why on earth do hon. Members want to copy the example of Germany and have regional government imposed on something which, historically, culturally, economically and politically, has no relevance to the German, French or Spanish situations? Those countries all had good historical, cultural and political reasons for setting up regions. One hundred years ago, Germany was a collection of different states that were brought together, and Spain has had great problems that needed to be redressed by regionalism. Italy was a similar case. In talking about England, we have a country that dates back 1,000 years, so regions are an artificial irrelevance.

The people of Yorkshire are proud of being in a county called Yorkshire. They do not need another region. The great cities of Yorkshire—Leeds, Bradford and Sheffield—got rid of an extra tier of government above them and fought inside their own party to abolish a Labour-run county council. They do not want another regional tier. What would it do? Let us be realistic. No one here is asking what are to be their powers or where the powers are coming from—this place or local government. They are always bound to come from local government.

The dynamic cities of Yorkshire will lose powers to some other amorphous tier. Will it bring any more money into the health service? Over the past 10 years, £133 million has been put into the health service in Leeds. Would a regional council improve on that? Of course not. There would be a fight between the various political factions to divide the spoils, and Goole might get some money—it might need some—but that would not necessarily improve the position of Leeds or Sheffield. A regional council will simply be a talking shop. It will be costly to run, it will want taxing powers and it will interfere.

Yorkshire is a dynamic county and Leeds is booming. There is nothing that a regional council could give Leeds that Leeds does not already have. Unless Opposition Members can tell the ordinary people how an extra tier of government would be more successful for them, as against the extra cost, the intervention in business and all the extra bureaucracy involved, I can see no attraction in the idea. It is being offered as a sop to Labour party members in the north of England and Yorkshire because of what is being proposed for Scotland and Wales. That is a disgrace. It is not constitutional reform; it is a constitutional nightmare.

9.5 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): We must get the Conservative party to recognise what it has done to the country. It has destroyed the foundations of its historic success: it has destroyed deference and respect for authority. British people now wish to do things for

themselves. They do not want to trust a Government in Westminster to do it. They feel confident of their ability to take decisions for themselves, in their own regions and in their own nations.

We have just heard two foolish speakers from the Conservative Benches. The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) made a speech that dwelt on jobs for the boys, making references that fell below the standard that I would have expected of him. If he wants to speak about jobs for the boys, let us look at the existing jobs and the existing boys.

The hon. Gentleman must recognise that there is an existing tier of regional government that is unaccountable to anyone. Look at the regional NHS executive, whose chairman, Mr. Greetham, one of the existing boys, helps to control a budget of £1 billion and runs an NHS regional executive that does not hold a single open meeting and has no public records of what it gets up to.

That is a part-time job for Mr. Greetham. He is a very busy man. He is so busy that he has been given, on the NHS, a free Land Rover Discovery. I am quite worried about him. He once had to ring me on his mobile telephone from his Land Rover. I thought to myself, "I hope they've managed to give him a handset, so that he is not speaking while holding his mobile phone. We wouldn't want the guy to be put at risk." There are existing jobs. There are existing boys.

Let us consider the main administrative functions of regional government in the north of England. Who controls the Government office for the north-east? It is Lord Fraser of Carmyllie. There is no need for the hon. Member for Hexham to shake his head. Lord Fraser is a perfectly decent bloke. In 1644, a Scottish army besieged and captured Newcastle. Fair dos, but we do not want to make a practice of it.

It is time for Lord Fraser of Carmyllie to go homeward and think again. It is time that we had a regional government in the north that could do the job that he is doing, with a block grant—no taxation needed or wanted—within the existing controlled spending totals, redeployed according to the priorities of people in the region. It is not much to ask.

We have the jobs and we have the boys; now we want a tier of democratic administration to deal with matters. We do not want to interfere with local government—that has happened far too much already. The Conservative Government have abolished two historic counties in the north. We do not want to go down that road: we want to leave matters as they are. There is a tier of central Government overseeing the health service, economic development and the administration of regeneration budgets to local authorities that we believe should be controlled and deployed democratically so that it is accountable to the people of the region.

The test of any principle occurs when things get difficult. I think that the hon. Member for Hexham dealt with some rather scurrilous issues. The test of our belief in accountability, in scrutiny and in freedom of information comes when things get awkward. I invite the hon. Gentleman—I will join him—to ask the Nolan committee to examine those issues. Nothing cannot be improved; he can put any evidence that he has before that committee. We believe that people wish to take decisions for themselves, and that more openness, transparency and confidence will give back to the British people their lives in their own neighbourhoods.

The crucial point is that our proposals will be subject to the referendum test. If the hon. Member for Hexham believes that his feelings about the people of the north are correct, he will be able to campaign for a no vote in that referendum—and good luck to him. However, we believe that we have the convictions and the support of the people of the north. They want genuine, accountable, democratic government. We believe that we shall carry the vote in the referendum, and the hon. Gentleman will have to accept defeat.

9.11 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I have great feelings of tenderness towards the devolution debate. I really enjoy getting stuck in to this argument. I look back affectionately to the last debate in 1979, when we were told that the people of Scotland and Wales were demanding assemblies. Referendums were conducted, and we found that there was no great demand. Eighteen years of Tory government followed, so we owe much gratitude to the devolution issue.

There is great inconsistency in the proposals for Scotland, for Wales, for Northern Ireland and for England. How could Scotland have a tax-raising parliament with legislative powers while Wales had, in effect, another Grand Committee? It does not make sense, as the president of Plaid Cymru, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), has recognised. I had great hopes for this debate initially: I thought that the Opposition would provide some answers. I thought that Labour Members would discuss serious issues, such as the West Lothian question, and give some details about the tartan tax.

However, we had nothing but knockabout from the Leader of the Opposition. It was a pretty pathetic performance. He concluded by claiming that the Government lacked the courage to go to a general election. There is no lack of courage on this side: we must put important measures on the statute book, and when that is accomplished, we shall face the electorate with confidence. The right hon. Gentleman has no right to talk about courage. He shot out of the Chamber like a scalded cat on Monday because he was too embarrassed to stay and witness Labour's great flop in the disgraceful vote that he had forced. He cannot talk about courage with any conviction.

I compliment the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who at least tried to address the issues, although I do not agree with what he said. The Liberals are honest in their beliefs about a Scottish Parliament. They believe that it would mean a reduction at Westminster in the number of Members of Parliament from Scotland. It is quite sensible that that should be so. There would be 123 Members in a Scottish Parliament—73 elected, the rest picked from party lists, party placements, and proportional representation, which the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) supports nowadays. In the past, he argued against it strenuously. Now he has capitulated. He has given up. He sits there smiling, but he has given up on his principles. In so doing, he has simply followed the line of his party leader, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair).

The hon. Gentleman talks about Conservative opinion back in 1974. The Conservatives were wrong at that time. It was the wrong policy, but we had the guts to face up to

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

the mistake that we had made. We rejected the devolution policy because it would have been disastrous not only for Scotland but for the United Kingdom, so we gave up on it, and perhaps with good reason. In 1974, when we pushed that stupid argument, we lost the election. *[Laughter.]* That was a lesson for us.

The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) laughs, but I guarantee that a Labour Government, if ever elected, would be lucky to have more than one stretch in office, particularly if they introduced those proposals.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley is waving his arms about. I do not know whether he just likes to try to follow me—

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Heaven forbid.

Mr. Gallie: If the hon. Gentleman followed what I said and followed my line much more often, he would be far better advised than he is at the moment, and he probably would not have spent 18 years on the Opposition Benches.

Why am I concerned about a Scottish Parliament? Scots have a leading role to play in whatever role they choose to follow. In the United Kingdom, Scots have played that leading role and delivered the goods in a range of ways. Scots should not hide their light under the bushel. We should not retreat behind our borders. We have a leading part to play here in the United Kingdom.

I recognise the honest arguments made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who believes the things that he says. I am not sure that many others believe them, but he certainly does, and he has the confidence to push through his arguments. His are honest arguments. The Scottish nationalists talk about an independent Scotland. The Scottish Parliament offered by the Opposition would bring about the Scottish National party's objective sooner than would ever be possible through normal democratic process. Why? Let us look at the financing of the Scottish Parliament.

Even with the 3 per cent. that the Scottish Parliament could add to its budget through income tax, at least 97 per cent. of its funding would come from Westminster. The level will be set here. Scots will not control that, although they will control how the budget is spent. Just as with local authorities, every failure of the Scottish Parliament will be because it does not have enough cash. It will claim that it is strapped for cash because Westminster will not give it the money to spend.

Every local authority in Scotland complains at the moment that it cannot deliver services because it does not have enough money. Whose fault is that? Is it because local authorities waste money? Is it because they do not manage their affairs properly? They say, "It is nothing to do with us. It is the fault of the Scottish Office, which does not provide us with the readies." That is their complaint. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members agree with me that that is what would happen if we were to have a Scottish Parliament. It would never have enough in the bank or in the kitty, and would always blame Westminster. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am tired of hearing repeated sedentary observations. If hon. Gentlemen want to intervene, they must do so in the proper way.

Mr. Gallie: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought you were calling time on my speech; I am delighted that you were not.

Opposition Members tell us that candidates for the parliament will be selected on a 50-50 split of men and women. Is that discrimination in favour of women or in favour of males? Would it be permissible for 52 per cent. to be women, or do they want a bang-on split? They must provide much more detail.

When the hon. Member for Hamilton responds, I hope that, for once, he will deal with some of the questions that have been asked throughout the debate.

9.20 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I wonder whether the bright spark who came up with the idea of this debate has been banished to the outer areas, suddenly realising that it was one of the great classic own goals. The debate has shown a Government in turmoil. It was conceived in blind panic, as the devolution lie machine went off the rails last week with the dismissal of the Health Secretary, who is sitting with us this evening below the salt. He is out of sight of the general public, banished and well away from those in charge of the constitution.

We have heard some powerful speeches in this interesting debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) wiped the floor with the Prime Minister, who lived down to his own reputation. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) also made a powerful speech and put sensible arguments for devolution, with which we are in absolute accord. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) was Secretary of State for Wales in the last Labour Government. His dream is about to come true.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and my hon. Friends the Members for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) and for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), as English Members of Parliament and as Englishmen, said categorically to the House that England has nothing to fear from our devolution proposals. In strong speeches in this Union Parliament, my hon. Friends the Members for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) made the case for a greater decentralisation of power.

I draw the House's attention to three speeches made by senior Members of the House from the Conservative Benches, which I thought were particularly important. The right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) and the hon. Members for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) and for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) made interesting and thought-provoking speeches. All of them began their remarks by saying that they disagreed with the Prime Minister, and with the thesis that our constitution should not be changed.

The hon. Member for Lewes said that we should have a Bill of Rights: he quite properly put the arguments for building the European convention on human rights into British law. The right hon. Member for Enfield, North is about to leave the House, having served as a Minister for almost as long as I have been on the Opposition Front Bench. He disagreed with the Prime Minister and said that changes in the way in which we, and especially the House, operate were needed. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire disagreed with the Prime Minister on the government of London, on hereditary peers and on fixed-term Parliaments. I congratulate them on breaking the false unity of doing nothing about a British constitution that desperately needs something done about it.

I shall come to other interesting speeches in a minute. Those of us who come from Scotland were entertained by the startling contention of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). Last year, the independent Scotland to which he referred was to be the 22nd most prosperous country in the world. I estimate that a mere 10 months have elapsed between then and what the hon. Gentleman says now: on the basis of figures supplied by the Chief Secretary to the Trsry, no less, we are now to be the eighth most prosperous country in the world. I must say, as the hon. Member for Hamilton, that here is the man who could take over as manager of Hamilton Academicals and move us from the second to the premier division by the end of next month.

A deeply depressing aspect of the debate and, in particular, of the Prime Minister's opening speech, is the fact that, in all the serious discussion that has gone on here, we have heard no new ideas. There has been no vision, and not a single thought about how our constitution could be improved, modernised, or brought up to date. The present Government are bloated with the sad but profound complacency that comes from 18 years in power. Today's debate has served the country well: people outside will not have missed the sight of an Administration marked by the confusion and contradictions that lie at the heart of this Government's position. Our view—a view that is widely shared in the country as a whole—is that the way in which our constitution operates, and the way in which a Government relate to the people in a democracy, must be as modern, robust and sensitive as the times in which we live.

Opposition Members have a clear vision of what is needed. We need decentralisation of power, taking power closer to the citizens who are affected by it. We need more openness in the way in which government—

Mr. Michael Forsyth *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to wait? He will have 20 minutes in which to speak.

Mr. Forsyth: I would like to intervene.

Mr. Robertson: I will not take an intervention at this point. *[Interruption.]* I wonder whether the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), can remember being enjoined, at the last Scottish Grand Committee, to remember that he is a Minister of the Crown, and perhaps behave like one for a moment or two.

We stand for the decentralisation of power to take power closer to the citizens who are affected by it, more openness in the way in which government is conducted, more democracy in the way in which decisions are made, and a more transparent judicial system, with fundamental rights for the ordinary citizen. Where, in the Prime Minister's speech, was there any Conservative vision of what needs to be improved in this country? What ideas—what proposals—have we heard for change to this deeply centralised, quango-ridden, over-secretive British system, which is so unpopular?

In Scotland, we already have devolution—bureaucratic devolution. What we want is democratic devolution. Scotland already has a Scottish Office, a Department of State that covers eight areas of responsibility dealt with by existing Departments. It has a huge budget—£14.5 billion—and a Secretary of State to whom some 21,500 public servants are accountable. He alone decides how all that money is to be spent; he alone appoints between 4,000 and 5,000 quango members, who between them, spend £7 billion of public money. We now have three times as many quango appointees as we have elected councillors. He alone decides what the priorities in Scotland will be. We are talking about one man's priorities, one man's dogma and one man's waste—about one man whose party can barely muster 15 per cent. in the latest Scottish opinion poll.

Let me say to the House, with restraint and with care, that the present arrangement is not fair, that it is not just, that it is not working, and that it is threatening the unity of our country, but all we have seen, beneath the veneer of—

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Mr. Richards *rose—*

Sir Hector Monro *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: I shall give way to the right hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro).

Sir Hector Monro: Having sat through nearly all the debate, I am still awaiting an answer to a simple question. As the hon. Gentleman knows, my constituency runs along the border. Many of my constituents live in Dumfries and work in Carlisle, and many live in Carlisle and work in Scotland. Will the hon. Gentleman explain to whom those people will pay their tartan tax, and why?

Mr. Robertson: People in Scotland will not have their tax increased or decreased unless they have first voted in a referendum to give the Scottish Parliament the necessary power, and subsequently voted in a Scottish parliamentary election for parties who say in advance that they will use the power. To say that power is a tax is a lie. A decision will be taken by the Scottish people. The liability to pay tax will be determined, as will other taxes in the United Kingdom, by residency, the definition of which will remain the same as it is in current UK tax legislation. That is the specific answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question.

Beneath the veneer of this absolutist, unbending devotion to the wholly negative campaign for absolutely no change is a profound mass of contradictions which at one and the same time debase the argument and produce an incoherence which seriously endangers this country's unity.

[Mr. Robertson]

What a muddled, confused party are the Conservatives. The Government say in their document that their devolution plans for Northern Ireland will consolidate and strengthen the United Kingdom, but they tell us that devolution for Scotland and Wales would shatter the United Kingdom. The document proposes a 90-strong law-making assembly for Northern Ireland and states that that is how local people could take more power over the way their part of the country is governed, but the Government insist that a law-making parliament in Edinburgh and an assembly in Cardiff would be "teenage madness".

The party that is opposed to proportional representation proposes a PR system for the Northern Ireland Assembly, but when we propose a proportional system for Scotland and Wales, and in doing so give up the automatic advantage that we get from first past the post in those two countries, the Conservatives call it gerrymandering. The Government state:

"new arrangements for the governance of Northern Ireland must be acceptable to the people".

They propose a pre-legislative referendum as one of the Prime Minister's triple locks on the process.

When we propose a pre-legislative referendum for Scotland and Wales and White Papers, which we shall publish in advance, the Prime Minister promises to use the power of unelected peers at the other end of this building to frustrate a Bill for a referendum. They call the referendum a constitutional monstrosity. This is the Government who dare not even suggest tampering with the funding arrangements for Northern Ireland, and give it the highest per capita public expenditure in the United Kingdom. The same Government propose a punishment raid on Scotland's and Wales's fair share of the national cake as a penalty for democratising the business of running Scotland and Wales.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has been in the House a long time. In that time he must surely have noticed the special circumstances that exist in Northern Ireland; the special expenditure that is required and the special distress and sectarian difficulties that exist there. If the implication of what he says is that he would cut the expenditure on Northern Ireland against the background of the terrorism that people in Northern Ireland face, let him be specific. I hope that he will not continue with his misrepresentation of the past few minutes and the sheer, utter drivel that we have had from him since I came into the Chamber.

Mr. Robertson: No, we are not suggesting cutting the fair share of the United Kingdom's resources.

Mr. Trimble: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robertson: Perhaps I may be allowed to reply to the Prime Minister. After that, I shall certainly allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene.

We do not intend to cut Northern Ireland's fair share of the United Kingdom's resources, but neither are we threatening to cut the fair share of those resources for Scotland and Wales. The Prime Minister is right when he says that Northern Ireland is special and different, but so are Scotland and Wales. They have different demands and different needs, ambitions and aspirations. Why should they be denied what the right hon. Gentleman is offering the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Trimble: Will the hon. Gentleman take account of the fact that absolutely no one is suggesting that any significant fiscal power be devolved to any institution in Northern Ireland, so the arguments for maintaining the same level of services in Northern Ireland as we are entitled to are consequently overwhelming? Will he also take account of the fact that, in the current financial year, Northern Ireland expenditure is being cut in real terms, whereas expenditure in the United Kingdom is rising?

Mr. Robertson: I appreciate the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. It saves my coming back. I much admired his criticism of the Prime Minister on his double standards in offering Northern Ireland a settlement and rejecting it for Scotland and for Wales. The word that he used, although it is probably not parliamentary, was that the Prime Minister was making an ass of himself over his attitude to Scotland, and that is true.

This is the Prime Minister who tells us in a bizarre and historically illiterate speech that to tamper with the constitution would end a thousand years of British history, even though Scotland has been in the Union for only 300 years. The same Prime Minister changed a fundamental element in the British constitution to allow a single Tory Member to sue *The Guardian* newspaper. This is the Prime Minister who tells us that the Scots and the Welsh can vote for secession from the Union and that he will respect the decision, but who tells the same people that they cannot vote for devolution, even though it is by far the most favoured option of the Scottish people and it is that which will save the Union.

The Government say that devolution to Scotland and to Wales is

"the most dangerous proposition ever put before the British people",

but the same Government and the same Prime Minister have no plans to abolish the Scottish Parliament if it is set up, and many key Tory Members were proponents of exactly the same thesis in the 1970s.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Robertson: The finger of the Secretary of State for Scotland points at the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). I am not going to give way. He had better listen to what I have to say.

The finger points, and no wonder, because the tragedy of the hypocrisy, confusion and contradiction behind the Government's position is that the people of Scotland and of Wales are being used as pawns in a dangerously cynical game between wreck-it-all separatists and change-nothing Unionists—a genuine conspiracy between the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan to deny the people of Scotland what is their proper vote. Both of them have an interest in polarising the home rule debate between separatism and the status quo and in denying and defying the Scottish people, who simply want the safe, moderate and sensible improvement of the constitution, which is what we offer them.

When the Secretary of State plays these games of constitutional Russian roulette with the separatists, he plays with the very fires that could consume him and,

at the same time, the unity of this country. He is a dangerously foolish man, and his party, many of whose members watch the hysteria of the present Government's arguments with absolute dismay, should take notice of the high-wire act that he is indulging in with regard to the future of this country.

The people of this country—

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: Which country?

Mr. Robertson: The people of Britain know that the Conservative party has nothing to offer them in terms of constitutional change. It wants to fracture the Union. It appears that the Secretary of State for Scotland wants to encourage the idea that theirs is the only alternative, but it is absolutely not. When the Prime Minister talks about evolutionary change, he means no change.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In terms of order, am I right in saying that it is traditional in the House—and the hon. Gentleman is always defending its traditions—for an hon. Member, after he refers specifically to another hon. Member, to give way to that hon. Member?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The rule is that the hon. Member who has the Floor has absolute discretion as to whether he gives way or not.

Mr. Robertson: How nice it is to see the hon. Gentleman, who preaches the secession of Scotland from the Union, cherishing the customs and conventions of the House of Commons. That tells us what is going on. I will not give way, as I have a couple of minutes to go and I have certain points that need to be made.

This Tory party, which fought against votes for women, now says no, no, no to what the people want and what they have voted for peacefully in Scotland and Wales time after time. This Tory party, which fought tooth and nail against the creation of the national health service, says that hereditary peers—voting Lords whose right to legislate owes nothing to the people and everything to historical accidents—should continue to make the laws of the land. This Tory party, which has resisted and challenged even equal pay for women, now tells us that the Scots and the Welsh can vote for separation, but not for a new revived union of nations in partnership and amity.

This Tory party and this Tory Prime Minister, who can see that the rest of the world is going down the route of decentralisation and devolved power closer to the people, have nothing to offer the people of this country but criticism, hysteria and fear.

The fact is that this Tory party and its Tory Prime Minister have become the kissing cousins of the separatists, adding paraffin to the flames of nationalism by their arrogant defiance of the sensible middle way—the way that the majority of Scots and Welsh people want to go. This Tory party, its Tory Prime Minister and the Tory Government are clinging on to power like limpets to a wreck, which has nothing left to offer the people of Britain. They should be gone before they inflict any more damage on this country of ours.

9.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I should say in fairness to those hon. Members who do not attend regular Scottish debates that that was not one of the best speeches by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). What was remarkable about his speech was that he failed to answer the West Lothian question. He also failed to explain why it could be right that Scotland's people and Scotland's pensioners should have to pay an extra tartan tax so that failed Labour councillors can roost on Calton Hill and risk the integrity of the United Kingdom.

In his speech, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) promised us that he was committed to the idea of freedom of information, but information we got none. Questions we had, but answers we got none. The right hon. Gentleman not only failed to answer the West Lothian question, but it became apparent during his speech that he did not know what it was. I shall always cherish that moment when it suddenly dawned on him that it was about the functions of Scottish Members of Parliament in Scotland, as well as in England.

Those Scottish Members would have no say on health, education and housing, although they would be down here. Their sole purpose down here would be to act as Lobby fodder to enable the right hon. Gentleman to impose socialism—I should not have said that word—rather to impose his policies on England.

Mrs. Fyfe *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I will not give way. A lot of points were made in the debate and I plan to answer all of them.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield was asked to tell us who will pay tartan tax. The hon. Member for Hamilton has told us that the same rules would apply, so we will certainly work on that. We must take it then that anyone who spends fewer than 183 days out of Scotland will be liable to pay the tartan tax.

Mr. Maxton *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I do not intend to give way to anyone. I will answer the points raised in the debate.

The right hon. Gentleman refused to say why it was necessary to gerrymander the voting system in a Scottish parliament to achieve a gender balance. The Opposition's proposition is that a Scottish Parliament would be made up half of men and half of women, which would be achieved by putting people on a party list system. As there would be 129 Members of that Parliament, I am not quite sure what would happen to the unfortunate 129th.

The right hon. Gentleman was asked why he was proposing a tax-raising Parliament with legislative powers for Scotland but merely a talking shop for Wales, which would have no tax-raising powers. We got no answer. The right hon. Gentleman and others were asked to explain why Labour wished to impose quangos and then to turn those quangos into assemblies for the 10 regions of England when there is no demand for such assemblies. Answer came there none.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield was asked where the money would come from, and he could not tell us. The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has

[Mr. Forsyth]

made it clear that there is no extra money, over and above what the Government have planned. On our calculations, English regional assemblies would cost £270 million, and a Scottish Parliament would cost £77 million. From where will the money come? The right hon. Member for Sedgefield gave us no answer. However, we know where the money will come from—out of the health service and out of schools—to pay for those jobs for the boys, the buddies of Labour politicians.

Mr. Donohoe: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forsyth: I will give way to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield—who, for understandable reasons, could not stay to listen to all the speeches—because hon. Members made speeches that were diametrically opposed in their interpretation of what he said. Some of my hon. Friends thought that he had given a commitment, were he ever to form a Government, that any legislation on the constitution would be dealt with on the Floor in a Committee of the whole House. Others thought that he had not given such a commitment. I should be happy to give way to him, so that he can make the position clear.

There we have it. Even when we thought that the right hon. Gentleman had answered the question, he had not. When given an opportunity to answer, he refuses. It is quite extraordinary that any serious politician in the House could threaten to gerrymander our constitution by taking such business to an upstairs Committee Room. I wonder what people such as Mr. Crossman, Mr. Gaitskell and Mr. Silverman—who sat on the Select Committee on the Procedure of Public Business—would think of him? They clearly expressed the right of any hon. Member

"to move that any Bill should be retained on the Floor of the House",

and said that,

"with the exceptions indicated, the Government would for their part make a practice of refraining from moving in that sense, and of opposing such a motion if moved from another quarter."

Roughly translated, that means that the sacred concept in the House is that we deal with constitutional matters on the Floor of the House in a Committee of the whole House. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield may pretend to be talking to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). However, if he is not interested enough even to uphold the procedures of the House, not only is he not fit to be Prime Minister, he is not fit for Opposition.

The right hon. Gentleman could not tell us why he believed that free legislative referendums were an appropriate procedure in the United Kingdom. If he ever walked through the door of No. 10, we would be faced with rule by plebiscite. Let us add up the number of promises for referendums officially made by Opposition Members. They are now committed to 13 referendums. Jimmy Goldsmith, look out—they are the people who should be calling themselves the Referendum party.

The right hon. Gentleman argued that his proposals for constitutional change would "enhance and strengthen" the Union. Nonsense. With his half-baked proposals, he is the midwife of separatism. Hon. Members in the Liberal and Labour parties should have seen the faces of the nationalists in this debate. In Lenin's words, they are the "useful idiots" of the separatists in the House.

The Leader of the Opposition has let it be known that he admires Baroness Thatcher. We saw one thing in this debate—something that Baroness Thatcher was never able to do. He was able to silence the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) who sat behind the right hon. Gentleman like a ghost, and he is the man who first asked the West Lothian question. Those who make devolution proposals are still unable to answer that question.

Mr. Marlow: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I regret having to raise this point of order, but I understand that it is a convention of the House that, if one has spoken in a debate, one should be here to hear the reply to it. Is it not also the convention that one should listen to the reply? Could you, Madam Deputy Speaker, prevail on the Leader of the Opposition so that, instead of talking to his colleague the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—which he has done for the past 10 minutes—he will listen to what is being said in the debate?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair, unless the conversation is of such a kind that it interferes with the working of the House.

Mr. Forsyth: So, answers came there none from the right hon. Member for Sedgefield. Instead, we were treated to an exploration of various commitments made in manifestos of the 1970s and early 1980s. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales pointed out so brilliantly, that was rather like the prodigal son lecturing his father on devotion and prudence.

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield might like to reflect on one point as he considers answering the questions. His predecessor as Leader of the Opposition, the late John Smith, is reported as saying:

"members of the party"—

the Labour party—

"who were pressing for devolution to a Scottish Government without the loss of the office of the Secretary of State and a reduction in the number of M.P.s at Westminster were being dishonest."

They are John Smith's words on the unfinished business of devolution to which the right hon. Gentleman says he is committed.

To give him credit, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) answered, or tried to answer, the West Lothian question but, being a Liberal, he gave us two completely contradictory answers. The first was that he thought there should be a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament in this House. The second part of his answer was that he agreed with the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who takes the view that English Members of Parliament only should vote on English business in this House. It may be that the right hon. Member for Yeovil is not inconsistent; perhaps he takes the view that English Members of Parliament should vote only on English business and that there should be a reduction in the number of Members coming to the House from Scottish constituencies. I think we should be told.

The right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), who is a former Secretary of State for Wales, said that he was responsible for devolution in the last Labour Government. I have a word of warning for him: devolution destroyed the last Labour Government, and today we have seen how devolution will destroy this Labour Opposition and their hopes of government for ever.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) and my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) made a number of positive proposals for change. The hon. Member for Hamilton is wrong to present my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister as not prepared to embrace change. My right hon. Friend is not prepared to embrace ill thought out change whereby one cannot even answer the basic question about the consequences of any change that threatens the integrity of the United Kingdom and the standing of the House.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made a splendid speech, in which he rejected a pre-legislative referendum, which he rightly presented as an assault on the rights of the House. The Leader of the Opposition would do well to read the right hon. Gentleman's speech and embrace some of the respect he has for the status and standing of the House. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield warned us that we were no longer able to get rid of Neil Kinnock on polling day, and in doing so reminded me of the point made by my right hon. Friend—that it was the former Leader of the Opposition who first warned that, if assemblies with tax-raising powers were set up, that would be the beginning of the fracture of the United Kingdom.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield seemed to be somewhat Eurosceptic. I draw his attention to the fact that the Labour party's Front Benchers' policy is to fragment England into regions and to dissolve the House into competing parliaments and assemblies in order to reduce us to a series of regions in a Europe of the regions.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Walker) pointed out that Scottish Members of Parliament would become second-class Members at Westminster. We would not have the same status or standing. He said that it would damage Scotland's interests and our ability to maintain a strong voice at Westminster, where Scotland's budget would be determined. He rightly warned of the conflict that would arise between Edinburgh and London over funding and powers, which would lead in acrimony to the break-up of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Has my right hon. Friend noticed, as I have, that the speeches of the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) contained not one word about the rights of the people of England? They were all about Scotland and Wales, but what about the rights of the people of England?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. The leader of the Labour party needs the Scottish Members to impose socialism in Scotland through his Scottish Parliament and to impose socialism down here because he does not believe that he would be able to obtain a majority in England.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) put forward the case for appeasement as a way of dealing with nationalism. Nationalism should never be met with appeasement. We need to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism is a love of one's own country, not the hatred of someone else's, which is what we have heard from the nationalists.

Mr. George Robertson *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman, because the hon. Gentleman would not give way to me.

Mr. Robertson: I gave way to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Forsyth: I am not the Prime Minister. The hon. Gentleman did not give way to me.

Mr. Maxton: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State for Scotland intervened three or four times on my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and tried to intervene again on my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), but he refuses to give way to anyone. Is that not an abuse of the customs of the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I realise that there is some excitement in the House tonight, but, I repeat, it is up to the hon. Member who has the Floor to decide whether to give way.

Mr. Forsyth: I was happy to give way for clarification of the position on constitutional Bills being dealt with in the House, but my invitation was refused.

I draw the attention of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney to—

Mrs. Ewing *rose—*

Mr. Forsyth: If I give way to the hon. Lady, the hon. Member for Hamilton will accuse me of being a kissing cousin.

Mrs. Ewing: I shall certainly not allow myself to be accused of being a kissing cousin of the Secretary of State for Scotland. He has referred to nationalism. Would he tell the people of Denmark, the people of Sweden, the people of Finland or the people of Ireland that they had no right to govern themselves? Is not the right of self-determination enshrined in the statute books of the international community? Does he recognise that?

Mr. Forsyth: I do not for a moment dispute Scotland's right to be independent. I dispute the set-up proposed by the Leader of the Opposition, which would lead to independence through acrimony and disillusion. If the people of Scotland want to vote for independence, they can.

Scottish National party members are starting to sound like travelling salesmen for Ireland. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) told us that we should

[Mr. Forsyth]

follow the model of Ireland. Unemployment in Ireland stands at 11.8 per cent. Here in the United Kingdom it is 7.5 per cent.

Mr. Donohoe: They do not fiddle the figures.

Mr. Forsyth: On the same basis. We want jobs and prosperity. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan ought to be aware of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) was one of those who thought that the Leader of the Opposition had made a pledge. That just goes to show that anyone dealing with the Leader of the Opposition has to read the fine print. My hon. Friend warned of the legislative quagmire that a Labour Government would get into. The people of this country are concerned about jobs, health, education, defence and law and order—all issues that we have pioneered, bringing prosperity and success.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) reminded us about Irish home rule. I should like to draw the attention of the House to a Cabinet committee's decision of 1919 about Ireland, when there was to be a devolved assembly. The view was:

"In regard to representation in the Imperial Parliament the Committee are clear that so long as the Imperial Parliament exercises taxing powers in Ireland, Ireland must have the right to representation in the Imperial Parliament on the basis of population. This, however, should be coupled with a provision that Irish members shall not be allowed to speak or vote on any question which in the opinion of the Speaker, if it related to Ireland, would lie within the scope of the Irish legislature."

Mrs. Ewing: And they left.

Mr. Forsyth: That is precisely the point that we are trying to make. I am delighted to have the hon. Lady's support on that.

We heard excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and a number of my other colleagues. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan gave us the usual fantasy economics about the possibility of an independent Scotland.

Our constitution is the staff of political life. It has always been subject to reform; it should never be subject to revolution. Opposition Members, for perceived party advantage, have embarked upon a reckless and incoherent course of constitutional wrecking that would reduce our country to domestic anarchy and international impotence. Behind the Charter 88 waffle and the pretended concern for Scotland and Wales lies nothing more idealistic than a cynical determination to gerrymander our constitution for party interest. It is irresponsibility—

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister consistently to refuse to take interventions from Opposition Members when his Conservative colleagues have repeatedly heckled Opposition speakers?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already made it clear several times and I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman did not get the message the first time. It is entirely up to the hon. Member who has the Floor whether he or she wishes to give way.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

CONSOLIDATION BILLS [*Money*]

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Town and County Planning (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, if the Bill is committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed; and that as soon as the proceedings on any Money Resolution relating to the Bill have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

Local Government Services (Leicester)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Lait.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I am pleased to see that there are more Members in the Chamber than normal for an Adjournment debate, but I am sure that the number will drop to its customary level within a matter of seconds.

I am delighted to have secured this Adjournment debate, but I am sad that it has to highlight the threat to local government services in Leicester as a consequence of the Government's revenue support settlement. I discussed Leicester in the local government finance debate two weeks ago, but received no satisfactory reassurances on that occasion, which is why I seek to revisit the subject today.

During that debate, Member after Member said that, despite Government assurances to the contrary, the proposed financial settlement would lead to increased pressure on service provision. I think that my colleagues from Leicester would agree that nowhere is the problem more acute. At a time when the city is preparing to take on major new responsibilities as a unitary authority, it is faced with the worst budget settlement in its history. Inevitably, that will have dire consequences for service provision and development.

Perhaps at this juncture the Minister will seek to answer two specific questions. First, why is Leicester the only 1997 unitary authority to be capped at its notional 1996–97 budget plus 1 per cent? Secondly, why does Leicester face the lowest budget settlement of any reorganising authority this year or last?

I appreciate that the Government can reasonably argue that, in a budget of over £260 million, some savings should be possible, but the scale of the proposed cuts takes them out of the league of efficiency savings. I should like the Minister's comments on those two questions, and on what he feels would be reasonable efficiency savings in a budget of £260 million.

As I said on a previous occasion, Leicester is non-metropolitan district council that is permitted to overspend in the current year 40 per cent. above standard spending assessment. It gives me no pleasure to make the point again, as I realise that the Minister may use it to attack the city's position, but that is the reality, and to argue that it is wrong and that it is the root of the problem will do nothing to resolve the difficulties that the city will face in the next financial year.

As a unitary authority, Leicester will have a spending limit of some 2 to 2.5 per cent. above standard spending assessment. Unless the Government are prepared to make late changes, that will entail cuts of about £70 million to existing budgets. I am sure that the House will realise that no service can be protected from such a savage reduction in budget.

The city council is already having to look closely at many sensitive areas. There is a proposal to cut £1.7 million from the schools budget, some £500,000 from elderly people's homes, and £1.3 million from employment training. The leisure services in Leicester will be decimated, with the possible closure of St. Margaret's baths. Housing renewal strategy that assists owner-occupiers in the inner city will be hard hit, neighbourhood centres throughout the city may face closure, and all voluntary organisations—that play a vital part in confronting many social problems—will have their funding affected.

Some organisations, such as the Federation of Moslem Organisations, will cease to receive funding altogether. That is a particularly unhappy decision in a multi-ethnic city such as Leicester.

Perversely, while services are being cut, the capping limit will lead to an £80 fall in band D council tax. Leicester could spend an extra £5.8 million next year and still deliver a reduction in council tax. It will come as no surprise that there is real disquiet among council employees about the impending threat of redundancy. According to the latest calculations, some 300 to 400 staff will be affected, and up to 275 people will face compulsory redundancy. The threat of redundancy is having an adverse affect on staff morale, and inevitably that will persist long after the vesting day of the new unitary authority in April 1997.

The cuts and their consequences have provoked anger and alarm in the community. There have been many public protests and demonstrations at council meetings, calls for industrial action from trade unions, coalitions seeking a budget above cap, and a huge quantity of correspondence seeking reassurance that clearly cannot be given about specific projects.

I hope that, even at this late stage, we can convince the Minister and the Government that it would be a disaster for the new unitary authority to start life with large service cuts and redundancies as a consequence of the unexpectedly harsh revenue settlement for Leicester. The city council recognises the need to rationalise and review services following unitary status, but this is not the time to do it, given the immense pressure imposed by the level of cuts. It is not the best or the most cost-effective way to proceed. The city requires time and a slightly more generous settlement.

The Minister will be aware, because there has been correspondence between his Department and the city council, that there is an option open to the council—if the Government are prepared to agree—and that is for the council to maintain council tax at its present level, and to set a budget above the cap. That would produce an extra £5.8 million, which would offer some protection to key services.

I hope that the Minister will be able to indicate some sympathy towards this proposal. If it was to be adopted and given sanction by the Government, it would afford some further protection to key services, which is undoubtedly necessary at the present time.

10.10 pm

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) on raising this matter in the House, and thank him for giving me—with his typical courtesy and kindness, which I have enjoyed for so many years—a little time in which to speak.

This is likely to be my last speech in the House, after some 27 years of service. It is right that my last speech should be, as the first was, so long ago, a plea to the

[Mr. Greville Janner]

Government for fairness and justice for the people of the city of Leicester. I am deeply indebted to those people and especially to my constituents from Leicester, North-West and now from Leicester, West for re-electing me for so long.

At one time I was the first Labour Member north of London up the M1, and, alas, the only one in the city, and I remember that grim evening so well. I have survived, however, and have done so because of the confidence and kindness of my constituents. I wish them to know how much I appreciate them, as do my family, and as did my wife.

The purpose of being here in this House is to help my constituents and the people I serve to have better lives, but that has not been easy with this Government, partly because they keep cutting the funds and resources available to the council, so that it cannot provide the services it should. They do that in the hope, of course, that the council will be blamed, and that, when it comes to election time, it will be the Labour councils and the Labour candidates who are blamed for what is the disgraceful behaviour of the Tory Government.

I have read the proposals, and I echo every word that my hon. Friend has said tonight. I hope that the Minister will look again—please—at the capping on the budget, and will lift it sufficiently to enable the council to do its job. It is irrelevant to me whether my constituents who seek my help voted for me or not; it should be irrelevant to him and to the Government who controls the council they seek to cap. It is the job of the council to serve the citizens, and it should be job of the Government to enable the council to do so.

Finally, I wish to pay my tribute to the all the people of the city of Leicester of all parties who have been so kind to me, and, indeed, to my father for some 25 years before that. Our friendships have crossed boundaries, and the courtesies and kindnesses that we have received have not been of party, although I am deeply grateful to Councillor Janet Setchfield, to Councillor George Billington, to Councillor Ray Flint and to all my other friends who have helped me within the Labour party.

As a final gesture, I ask the Minister to do a final kindness to me, and to reconsider the Government's proposals, so as to enable Leicester city council to have the funding it needs to do the job that it should.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): It is an unusual debate that contains a swan song, and the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) gave an interesting speech. I know that he is as grateful as I am to the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) for this opportunity to discuss the problem that Leicester is experiencing. I am sorry that, with his intellect and ability, and as a member of the Labour party in Leicester, he was unable to help the council to straighten out its finances. As I think he suspected I would explain to him—and as I suspect, in his heart, he knows—that is where the incompetence lies.

Leicester's circumstances should first be considered in the context of the local government financial settlement as a whole. The settlement was tight; last year's was tight. Next year, with a new Conservative Government, again it will be tight—and that is the way it should be. Local government expenditure is about 24 per cent. of central Government expenditure; it needs to be tight for the sake of the economy of a competitive United Kingdom, and it must continue to be tight.

Forward-thinking councils throughout the country have recognised the importance of that, and have sought efficiency savings year after year. Year after year, Leicester obviously has not. It is murally dyslexic—unable to read the writing on the wall.

Although the settlement was tight, it provides all local authorities with sufficient resources to provide good-quality services at affordable cost to council tax payers. In taking our decisions, the Government took account of all the pressures on local authorities, as well as the potential to make savings.

The House should be aware that Leicester's standard spending assessment is the second highest of all unitary authorities, at more than £255 million. Its population is comparatively high, but its SSA in pounds per head of population is the highest in its class. We know that Leicester will make spending plans for provision of new services in its first year as a unitary authority, but the standard spending assessment takes that into account.

The SSA system, used in distribution of revenue support grant for authorities in an area that is subject to local government structural changes, simply reflects the change in circumstances. The same methodology is used for all authorities with the same service responsibilities, and is, of course, based on the relevant data for each authority's area. Reorganising authorities are therefore treated fairly, both individually and relative to other authorities.

As it is a new unitary authority, one of the other influences on Leicester's spending next year is the notional amount calculated to act as a base budget for capping purposes. I know that Leicester had wisely worked very closely with the county to agree disaggregation of the county's budget as part of the notional amounts process. That has ensured that Leicester will be able to budget to spend at least as much in its area next year as was spent this year, if it chooses.

As with many Labour authorities, Leicester considers that it needs an increased share of resources, and that its provisional capping is too low. The permitted increase is a direct reflection of the level of the settlement. Capping is an essential tool to require authorities to play their part in restraining local government expenditure, which accounts for about a quarter of public spending. Its other purpose is to protect council tax payers from higher than necessary council taxes, which would result from excessive increases in local government budgets.

Leicester has a 1 per cent. permitted increase under the provisional capping limits, which is the class permitted increase for those unitary authorities. It therefore needs to consider its performance, which has been studied by the Audit Commission. If we consider the percentage of council tax collected of the amount payable, we find that the average for Conservative authorities is 96, and that for Labour authorities is 92, but for Leicester it is 89.83.

If we consider housing benefit applications processed in 14 days—helping people in need—we find that, for Conservative authorities, the average is 87 per cent., for Labour authorities 81 per cent., and for Leicester

72.7 per cent. If we consider council tax benefit claims processed within 14 days, we find that, for Conservative authorities, the average is 84 per cent. and for Labour authorities 77 per cent., but Leicester collapsed again, to 73 per cent.

If we consider the source of business—development—and measure that by the percentage of planning applications decided within eight weeks, we find that the Conservative average is 79 per cent., the Labour average 76 per cent., but Leicester barely makes it over 52 per cent. If we consider the percentage of rent allowances worked out within 14 days—also helping the poorer people in the area—we find that the Conservative average is 83; the Labour average 72. What is Leicester's average? Less than 63.

It behoves the local authority to get its act together. It has had the opportunity; it has been pointed out before.

The capping principles will not be confirmed until after authorities have set their budgets. If Leicester wishes to budget above its provisional cap, it is, of course, free to do so. We shall take into account all the circumstances of an authority before deciding on a final cap that is reasonable, appropriate and achievable, and I think that we have set that.

Additional resources have been made available to Leicester under a scheme allowing reorganising authorities to bid for supplementary credit approvals to meet the one-off indirect costs of reorganisation. The arrangements for the scheme mean that, in general, authorities will not be required to meet borrowing or interest costs for at least three years, by which time savings should have been realised. I know from my experience in local government that that is an opportunity to make savings instantly, and it appears to have been lost.

Leicester has so far received £6.2 million from the scheme. That includes the allocation made just before Christmas for 1997-98, when Leicester was awarded an SCA maximum amount of £3.1 million.

While we are considering this matter, we should look at some of the local media reports on Leicester councillors. At the beginning of this year and the tail end of last year, Labour councillors in Leicester awarded their leader a £22,145 special responsibility allowance, in addition to his £4,000 allowance. I understand from the local papers that for themselves they adopted a scheme that will result in a massive rise in councillor allowances. Their basic allowances will increase by 606 per cent. As in Doncaster, they have gone wandering off elsewhere.

Mr. Jim Marshall: I am sorry that the Minister has stooped to that level of political dogfighting, particularly as he has given an incorrect figure. He referred to an increase in members' allowance of 600 per cent. The press forgot to take into account, and the Minister has also clearly failed to take into account, the fact that that ignores the removal of the previous allowances that councillors were paid. The figure is therefore simply incorrect.

I do not wish to lose sight of the real problem. The figures to which the Minister referred amount to less than 0.001 per cent. of the council's overall budget and of the £17 million cut in the real budget. I want the Minister to deal with that problem rather than make cheap political jibes.

Sir Paul Beresford: Will the hon. Gentleman refer back to the first figure I gave? I said that the average council tax collection rate for Conservative councils is 96 per cent.; the Labour average is 92.7 per cent.; and the figure in Leicester is 89.83 per cent. That represents millions of pounds.

The hon. Gentleman should also reflect on what I am trying to point out, without going through the budget blow by blow, which I do not wish to do—if Leicester Labour councillors cannot do it, perhaps they should stand aside and let someone else do it. I am trying to point out that their attitude of mind is at fault. Even if it is a small percentage, it is a poor show that those councillors have taken the opportunity at this time to increase their allowances. If the hon. Gentleman reflects on how he voted at the tail end of last year—I do not know how he voted—it might cause him to think again.

Leicester's new unitary status this year gives it an opportunity to recognise that year on year expenditure needs to be based on decent, efficient services. Council after council throughout the country can manage it. The status and needs of Leicester council have been reflected in its SSA and its status compared with other unitary authorities in the same position. It is at the top of the list for Government grants and for SSA, but it still fails to meet the needs of its local people.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Ten o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 February 1997

DEFENCE

Radio Spectrum

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made in releasing two bands of 5 MHz in the 410–430 MHz band for civilian use; and if he will make a statement. [14344]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *782*, which should have made it clear that discussions between MOD and the Radiocommunications Agency, DTI identified channels on two bands of 5 MHz in the 410–430 MHz band that can be made available for civilian use by 1997. A large number of channels in the 410–430 MHz band have been released by MOD.

As recognised in the radio spectrum review stage 3 report, there are military systems in the band 410–430 MHz, which cannot be given up or whose frequencies cannot readily be changed. This being the case there is no possibility, at present, of the complete release of all channels within two bands of 5 MHz in the 410–430 MHz band.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the basic elements of specification, with special reference to length, breadth, draught, gross tonnage and propulsion, of the proposed replacement for the royal yacht Britannia. [14421]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The outline specification for the new yacht is currently being drawn up. We expect this process to take about a year, following which an invitation to tender, specifying the detailed requirement, will be issued.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many miles members of the royal family have travelled *(a)* in the royal yacht Britannia and *(b)* by other modes of transport supported by public funds in each of the past five years. [14638]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The information for royal travel is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the benefits to the United Kingdom of the attendance of the royal yacht Britannia at Cowes; how many days the yacht has attended Cowes in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [14509]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* In the last 10 years Britannia has spent the following number of days at Cowes:

Year	*Number of days*
1987	0
1988	6
1989	7
1990	6
1991	7
1992	8
1993	7
1994	9
1995	8
1996	8

Britannia's attendance at Cowes has continued the traditional royal patronage of this event, and contributed to the growth of this prestigious international regatta. This in turn benefits the local community around Cowes, in addition to the yachting industry.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the places where the royal yacht has been used to promote British exports and to attract inward investment since 1989, indicating the number of days and dates at each place. [14642]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The information requested is as follows:

Date	*City*	*Country*	*Organisation involved/event*
1989			
9 March	London	UK	British Invisible Exports Council (BIEC)
5 October	Port Klang	Malaysia	BIEC
1990			
30 October	Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	BIEC
11 December	London	UK	General Council of British Shipping
12 December	London	UK	General Council of British Shipping
1991			
26–27 April	Belem	Brazil	Environmental Seminar hosted by HRH The Prince of Wales
16 May	Miami	USA	The Motor Industry in Britain
21 May	Tampa	USA	Anglo-American Aerospace Summit (Non-military)
13 June	Lisbon	Portugal	Scottish Financial Enterprise/Locate in Scotland
25 September	London	UK	BIEC
1992			
2 June	Civitavecchia	Italy	BIEC
5 June	Leith	UK	Scottish Financial Enterprise/Locate in Scotland
21 October	Stockholm	Sweden	BIEC
1993			
25–26 March	Palm Beach	USA, Martinique/ St. Lucia	Locate in Scotland/Scottish Office CARITAG—British Overseas Trade Board
12 May	London	UK	London Forum

Date	City	Country	Organisation involved/event
8 October	Istanbul	Turkey	BIEC
12 October	Piraeus	Greece	Anglo Hellenic Chamber of Commerce
10 November	Abu Dhabi	UAE	Energy Seminar
16 November	Bombay	India	Sea Day—Indo British Partnership Initiative
17 November	Bombay	India	Sea Day—Indo British Partnership Initiative
17 November	Bombay	India	Seminar
18 November	Bombay	India	Sea Day—Indo British Partnership Initiative
18 November	Bombay	India	Seminar; 5 commerical (DTI/FCO) receptions; contract signing ceremonies
1994			
10–16 February	New York	USA	British Invisibles Sea Day Scotch Whisky Museum of Scotland Reception
9 May	Southampton	UK	DOT Agency Launch
23 May	Pembroke Dock	UK	Commercial Reception
24 May	Swansea	UK	Commercial Reception
21 June	Helsinki	Finland	British Invisibles Seminar British Invisibles Reception
22 June	Helsinki	Finland	Trade Reception
28 June	London	UK	London Dockland Development Corporation
29 June	London	UK	Lord Mayor Reception KGFS Reception
18 October	St. Petersburg	Russia	British Invisibles Seminar British Invisibles Reception
1995			
7 March	Abidjan	Ivory Coast	DTI
14 March	Walvis Bay	Namibia	FCO
28 March	Cape Town	South Africa	DTI/British Invisibles/South African British Trade Association
29 March	Cape Town	South Africa	DTI/Institute of Education
30 March	Cape Town	South Africa	DTI Seminar
31 March	Cape Town	South Africa	Africa 95
20 April	Tema	Ghana	Overseas Development Agency
21 April	Tema	Ghana	DTI
25 April	Dakar	Senegal	DTI
27 June	Dundee	UK	Locate in Scotland
17 August	London	UK	British Invisibles
4 October	Piraeus	Greece	British Invisibles
7 October	Piraeus	Greece	British Hellenic Chamber of Commerce
8 October	Piraeus	Greece	Britain in Greece Festival
25 October	Lisbon	Portugal	DTI and FCO
1996			
19 March	Savannah	USA	Northern Ireland Office
19 March	Savannah	USA	British Olympic Committee
1 April	Boston	USA	BBC, Public Radio International and Public Broadcasting WGBH
1 April	Boston	USA	British Olympic Association
2 April	Boston	USA	Welsh Tourist Board/British Tourist Authority
3 April	Boston	USA	British American Business Council
3 April	Boston	USA	Welsh Development Agency
15 April	Toronto	Canada	British Invisibles
16 April	Toronto	Canada	Lieutenant Governor of Ontario Commercial Reception
17 April	Toronto	Canada	British Canadian Chamber of Trade and Commerce
18 April	Toronto	Canada	Locate in Scotland
11 July	Amsterdam	The Netherlands	British Invisibles
12 July	Amsterdam	The Netherlands	Lunchtime Reception hosted by Her Majesty's Ambassador for winners of the Queen's Awards for Exports.

Britannia's programme for 1997 includes commercial events between mid-January and August in Malta, Dubai, Doha, Karachi, Bombay, Madras, Malaysia, Singapore, Bangkok, Manila, Nagoya, Kobe, Korea and Gibraltar.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many events on the royal yacht Britannia have been sponsored by outside bodies in each of the last five years; if he will list the sponsoring bodies, categorised as in *(a)* commercial, *(b)* charitable and *(c)* other organisations; and if he will make a statement. [14510]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave today to the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) for the list of sponsored events held aboard Britannia since 1989. Due to the wide variety of organisations represented during individual engagements, it is not possible to categorise the list by groupings.

Biological Warfare Germs (Southampton)

Sir James Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the dates in 1977 of the germ warfare tests which involved spraying the city of Southampton with simulants chosen to mimic biological warfare germs; and if he will make a statement. [14599]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Sir James Hill, dated 10 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question about dates in 1977 when biological defence studies were carried out in Southampton. The chemical Biological Defence Sector (CBD) at Porton Down is now part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

No studies were carried out in Southampton in 1977. Between 1965 and 1966 a series of experiments were conducted at various locations around the Southampton area using the harmless strains of the E.coli MRE 162 organism. These were immobilised on microthreads and contained within boxes which were then exposed to the atmosphere at various locations. No material was released in these experiments. The studies were carried out to determine the survivability of organisms when exposed to the atmosphere and those around Southampton particularly addressed survivability in or near built up city areas.

The technique for the immobilisation of the organisms was published in the scientific press in 1968 under the title 'A Microthread Technique for Studying the Viability of Microbes in a Simulated Airborne State' K. R. May and H. A. Druett. Journal of General Microbiology (1968) Vol. 51 pages 353–366.

I hope this information is helpful.

Low Flying

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about low flying incidents were received by the Royal Air Force centre at Welshpool in each year since 1992. [14848]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of complaints about military low flying received by the RAF community relations office (Wales) in each year since August 1993, when the post was established, are as follows:

	Number
1993[1]	14
1994	169
1995	225
1996	216

[1] August to December.

Territorial Army

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the effects of budget constraints on the operational effectiveness of the Territorial Army. [14918]

Mr. Soames: The Territorial Army continues to make an important contribution to the operational effectiveness of our fighting forces. We are confident that the funding it receives is commensurate with the tasks placed upon it.

Publicity Material (Languages)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many items and what percentage of armed forces recruitment publicity material is published in the Welsh language; and if he will make a statement. [14849]

Mr. Soames: The naval service and the Army produce one general information publication in a number of languages, including Welsh, aimed at parents, teachers and opinion formers. In addition, a Welsh language leaflet is produced for the Welsh Guards. Army advertising in regional newspapers and on local radio is also carried out in Welsh. Certain Welsh regiments produce recruiting material in Welsh. Percentage figures are not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of armed forces recruitment and publicity material is printed in the Urdu language. [14851]

Mr. Soames: Each service produces one general information publication in a number of Asian languages, including Urdu, aimed at parents, teachers and opinion formers. Percentage figures are not available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the referrals of the Gulf war veterans to Dr. Kocen at Queen's Square hospital for nervous disorders. [14157]

Mr. Soames: Following the disclosure that organophosphate pesticides had been used more widely in the Gulf than previously thought, 10 patients whose case histories suggested that they could have, or had, been exposed to pesticides were invited to return to the medical assessment programme—MAP—for a further assessment and a subsequent examination by Dr. Kocen at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery.

Six of these patients have either declined the invitation or failed to attend the MAP; all of these have been offered second appointments. Two patients have been seen by the MAP and by Dr. Kocen. One patient has been seen by the MAP and referred to Dr. Kocen; this patient did not attend for his first appointment with Dr. Kocen and cancelled his second appointment. The remaining patient has been given an appointment for the MAP on 10 February.

Another 44 veterans, who display certain symptoms which could be consistent with OP pesticide exposure but where there is no indication of exposure, have also been invited to re-attend the MAP, and if clinically appropriate, they will be referred to Dr. Kocen. These patients have all been offered appointments in February or March, except for two patients who have been given appointments in April at their request. Three patients have already been seen by the MAP and one has been referred to Dr. Kocen; the other two did not require further neurological referral.

Air Incident (Inverness)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the investigation into the alleged air near-miss incident over Inverness airport on 29 January involving a Tornado jet; and if he will make a statement. [15186]

Mr. Soames: This incident is under investigation and a report will be published by the Civil Aviation Authority in due course. Copies of such reports are routinely placed in the Library of the House.

Army Base Repair Organisation

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key targets for 1997–98 for the chief executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation. [15412]

Mr. Soames: The chief executive of the Army Base Repair Organisation has been set the following key targets for 1997–98:

1. To deliver a responsive repair service, which matches the needs of the customer both in peace and for operations to the agreed timeliness, quantity and quality criteria and offers value for money.
2. To remain with ABRO's allocated budget.
3. To maintain the 1997–98 ratio of labour costs to hours of production at 23 per cent. below the rate of agency launch.
4. To prepare full and cash costs for the significant base repair programmes by 31 March 1998.
5. To Include in ABRO accounts, closing balances as at 31 March 1998 for the cost of spare parts held by the agency.

6. To implement the ABRO system for handling customer feedback and conduct a customer survey.

7. To achieve ABRO land command support market test vesting day within nine months of final ministerial announcement.

8. To evaluate and recommend the CFQ strategy for ABRO Donnington to DGES(A) by 30 April 1997.

Royal Naval College

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the list of those who will serve on Sir Angus Stirling's committee which is to consider the future of the Royal Naval college, Greenwich; and if he will make a statement. [15462]

Mr. Soames: The Government decided last September to create a charitable trust to take over the responsibility for protecting the Royal Naval college, Greenwich, ensuring that it will be used in a fitting way to reflect the importance of the college to the nation's heritage and enhancing public access and enjoyment. It subsequently announced that Sir Angus Stirling would be the chairman of the trust.

We have now agreed that the body known as the Greenwich Foundation for the Royal Naval college should be registered as a charitable company limited by guarantee, with its stated objective as

"to preserve for the benefit of the nation the Royal Naval College site, buildings and monuments as being of historical, architectural, and artistic importance, and to educate the public thereon".

Registration is in hand.

I am also pleased to announce the names of those who have undertaken to serve as trustees of the foundation. They are: Sir Benjamin Bathurst, who retired as First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff in 1995, Sir David Cooksey, Richard MacCormac, Margaret Richardson, Christopher Swinson, Professor Thomas Kempner, Councillor Len Duvall, leader of the London borough of Greenwich, and Sir Franklin Berman. They will bring a wealth of local, naval, business, financial, heritage, architectural and educational expertise to the foundation.

The foundation is working closely with Greenwich hospital and with the Royal Navy to achieve a smooth handover of the site. Further to the recommendations of the advisory group, chaired by Dame Jennifer Jenkins, Sir Angus Stirling has already been exploring with the university of Greenwich, the National Maritime museum and other interested parties, the options for the future use of the site in a manner worthy of its historic and architectural status.

HEALTH

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists derive *(a)* more than 75 per cent. and *(b)* more than 90 per cent. of their fee income from orthodontic work. [12379]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *161*, how many dentists were attached to the dental reference service in each year since 1990. [15137]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is shown in the table.

Date	*Number of dental reference service dental officers*
31 March 1990	31
31 March 1991	26
31 March 1992	29
31 March 1993	30
31 March 1994	34
31 March 1995	37
31 March 1996	38
31 March 1997	'58

' Estimate.

Personal Social Services Records

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information has been obtained by his Department about the policy and procedures adopted by local authorities in respect of access to pre-1989 personal social services records; [13507]

(2) if he will make a statement on access to pre-1989 personal social services records in respect of each local authority for which information is available. [13502]

Mr. Burns: Legislation made in 1987 and 1989 gives people specific rights of access to, respectively, computerised and manual records held on them by social services departments, subject to some exemptions. While there is no statutory right of access to information compiled before these dates, the Department's general policy set out in various guidance from 1987 onwards is that authorities should give access to as much personal information as possible.

It is the responsibility of each local authority to implement the Department's policy on access to personal social services records and information on practices of individual authorities is not held centrally.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance his Department has given local authorities concerning access to personal records subsequent to, and in the light of, the Graham Gaskin case; [13505]

(2) what is his Department's policy on access to pre-1989 personal social services records; and how that policy has changed since the 1989 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the Graham Gaskin case. [13504]

Mr. Burns: Legislation made in 1987 and 1989 gives people specific rights of access to, respectively, computerised and manual records held on them by social services departments, subject to some exemptions. The Department's general policy set out in various guidance from 1987 onwards is that authorities should give access to as much personal information as possible.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what obligations there are on local authorities to make public their policies and procedures on access to personal records; and how such matters are monitored by his Department. [13501]

Mr. Burns: Guidance to local authorities on access to personal records—local authority circular (89)2—says that authorities should publicise the fact that individuals have the right to information subject to certain safeguards and tell people how to apply for access. Authorities should also consider whether special publicity is needed for people unable to speak English. It is the responsibility of each local authority to implement the Department's policy on access to personal social services records and information on practices of individual authorities is not held centrally.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he or his officials will seek to obtain the views on access to pre-1989 personal social services records of persons currently seeking access to such records. [13503]

Mr. Burns: No. We have asked all local authorities to implement the Department's guidance on access to social services records.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work his Department has undertaken in respect of compliance measures following the judgment in Graham Gaskin's case; what were the number and level of officials involved; what time scale was imposed by Ministers for the work; and what steps have been taken by Ministers in consequence of the work. [13506]

Mr. Burns: In their White Paper on open government, the Government proposed to create new rights of access to personal information held by Government and other public sector organisations, and to establish an independent review body to consider any cases where access is refused. This would meet the issues raised by the European Court of Human Rights' judgment in the Gaskin case. The Government are still committed to introducing legislation to implement these proposals as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows.

Hospitality

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the hospitality budget for *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS management executive for each year since 1989. [13755]

Mr. Horam: There is no hospitality budget for the Department and its agencies or the national health service executive, which is part of the Department.

Casualty Units

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many casualty units there were in each year since 1989. [13648]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available in the form requested.

Casualty unit is not a term used in the national health service. It is a colloquialism which could cover anything from minor injuries unit to a full trauma centre.

The figures for trusts and directly managed units in England with an accident and emergency department intended to be open 168 hours a week and with medical staff on site are shown in the table. A trust or directly managed unit may consist of a number of hospitals each with its own accident and emergency department.

Year	*Number*
1991–92	238
1992–93	226
1993–94	218
1994–95	216
1995–96	211

Before 1991–92 information was collected on an individual site basis. Comparable information for earlier years is not therefore available.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if there is compulsory competitive tendering in the national health service. [14346]

Mr. Horam: Since 1983 there has been a requirement to market test cleaning, catering and laundry services, at regular intervals, through a competitive tendering process.

Prostate Brachytherapy

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to extend the practice of prostate brachytherapy within the NHS. [14356]

Mr. Horam: None. The practice of prostate brachytherapy is a matter for clinical decision in discussion with the patient.

NHS Trusts

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what instructions he gives to health trusts regarding visits to *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* other medical centres, with special reference to when the closure of the hospital or centre is being considered; [14673]

(2) what steps he proposes to take *(a)* to make the proceedings of health trusts more accessible to members of the public and *(b)* to ensure better consultation about the work of health trusts. [14826]

Mr. Horam: Visits to trust premises are a matter for local management. Health authorities are however required to consult local interests over any proposal substantially to change services.

The code of practice on openness states:

"NHS trusts must hold at least one public meeting a year. An agenda, papers, the accounts and the annual report must be publicly available at least seven days in advance of the meeting. Provision must be made for questions and comments to be put by the public. Public meetings must be held in readily accessible venues and at times when the public are able to attend. Providing the public with access to more frequent general meetings or board meetings is good practice already followed by an increasing number of trusts."

Health Services (Norfolk)

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons hospital beds in Norfolk are currently being closed. [14824]

Mr. Horam: It is for health authorities and trusts locally to calculate the number of beds needed to respond to the needs of patients, taking account of a wide range of factors. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Alston, CBE, chairman of East Norfolk health authority and Mr. John Durance, chairman of North-West Anglia authority, for details of changes in bed provision for that area.

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations have been postponed in Norfolk in the last year for which figures are available. [14825]

Mr. Horam: The number of operations cancelled in Norfolk can be found in "Information on Cancelled Operations and Breaches of the Patient's Charter Standard". Copies of this document are available in the Library.

Cancelled Operations (Trent Region)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the annual change in the number of patients in the Trent region who have had operations cancelled *(a)* on the day they were due to go into hospital and *(b)* after admission since 1994–95. [15017]

Mr. Horam: Information on operations cancelled for non-medical reasons on the day a patient is due to be admitted, or after admission, is available in the Library.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department ceased collecting and holding centrally details of total numbers of hospital closures; what is the latest period since 1979 for which such figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [15170]

Mr. Horam: Information was collected on hospital closures until 1991. From that time responsibility for local closures has been devolved to health authorities and trusts, taking into account local priorities. A list of those substantial variations in services that have been contested by community health councils is available in the Library.

Rotherham General Hospital (Deaths)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by age, the number of deaths occurring at Rotherham district general hospital in 1995 and 1996 on *(a)* Monday, *(b)* Tuesday, *(c)* Wednesday, *(d)* Thursday, *(e)* Friday, *(f)* Saturday and *(g)* Sunday. [14278]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Denis MacShane, dated 10 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question on deaths at Rotherham District General Hospital. The Director has asked me to reply in his absence.

The data are shown in the attached tables. Figures for 1996 are provisional and relate only to the first two quarters of 1996.

Deaths at Rotherham District General Hospital, by day and by age

[1]1995

Age group	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*
<1	1	1	1	3	—	4	4
1–19	—	—	2	—	—	—	—
20–39	2	—	3	5	4	4	1
40–59	18	12	13	15	15	14	9
60–64	7	14	12	10	17	19	17
65–69	22	16	22	22	21	20	15
70–74	30	33	33	39	34	32	32
75–79	35	26	32	38	30	34	40
80–84	33	30	45	30	38	27	30
85 and over	39	33	33	36	45	27	25
All ages	187	165	196	198	204	181	173

[1] In 1995, there were 53 Sundays and 52 occurrences of each other weekday.

[1]1996

Age group	*Monday*	*Tuesday*	*Wednesday*	*Thursday*	*Friday*	*Saturday*	*Sunday*
<1	—	—	2	1	1	—	—
1–19	1	1	—	1	1	1	1
20–39	1	—	—	—	1	1	—
40–59	8	1	4	3	10	3	4
60–64	9	3	1	6	2	4	4
65–69	16	13	5	7	10	6	9
70–74	10	18	23	14	21	12	15
75–79	21	18	9	17	19	24	12
80–84	23	21	21	23	15	27	19
85 and over	19	14	19	28	17	17	20
All ages	108	89	84	100	97	95	84

[1] During the period covered in this table (January to June), each weekday had 26 occurrences.

Perinatal Mortality

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those EU countries with lower perinatal mortality rates than the United Kingdom.[12035]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 10 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the European Union (EU) countries which have a lower perinatal mortality rate than the United Kingdom.

The figures are shown in the attached tables. On 1 October 1992 the legal definition of a stillbirth was altered from a baby born dead after 28 or more completed weeks gestation to one born dead after 24 or more completed weeks gestation. This had the effect of raising the United Kingdom perinatal mortality rate in 1993.

Within the EU, differences of definition lead to variations in the measurement of perinatal mortality. It includes stillbirths with a minimum gestation period ranging from 22 to 28 weeks according to country.

Perinatal mortality rates[1] (1992)

	Number
United Kingdom	7.7
Spain	7.3
Austria	6.8
Finland	5.9
Denmark	5.8
Sweden	5.8

Source:
Eurostat—Demographic statistics 1996.
Note:
[1] Stillbirths and deaths within the first week of life per 1,000 live and stillbirths.

Perinatal mortality rates[1] (1993)

	Number
United Kingdom	9.1
Ireland	9.0
Germany	7.4
Spain	6.6
Luxembourg	6.3
Austria	6.1
Sweden	5.9
Denmark	5.4
Finland	5.1

Source:
Eurostat—Demographic statistics 1996.
Note:
[1] Stillbirths and deaths within the first week of life per 1,000 live and stillbirths.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Award Presentations

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) on how many occasions she or her Department have approached lottery distribution boards or grant recipients to arrange for her to make presentations of awards; what were the occasions; and who were the recipients; [14593]

(2) how many lottery awards she has personally presented; who were the recipients; on what dates the presentations were made; and what sums were involved. [14594]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is central to the role of Ministers that they promote the work of the Department and its associated bodies. The national lottery, and the awards made by the independent distributing bodies, are an important part of that work. It is only right, therefore, they should take the opportunity to draw attention to the excellent work being done by these bodies around the country. This can include involvement in the presentation of lottery awards.

The Department does not keep records of the occasions when Ministers have been associated with such presentations.

Lottery Grants

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage is she will provide a regional breakdown of lottery grants in respect of each of the five good causes. [14368]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Awards totalling over £2.8 billion have been made to 18,769 projects throughout the United Kingdom. I have arranged for a regional breakdown to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Draft Pensions Measure

Mr. Flynn: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if the commissioners have received the memorandum "Reasons why the Draft Pensions Measure is not Expedient" from the Parishes Protection Group; and if he will make a statement. [14973]

Mr. Alison: The commissioners have received this memorandum which has, I understand, been circulated to members of the parliamentary Ecclesiastical Committee. The commissioners do not accept the assertions in the memorandum, and will advise the Ecclesiastical Committee accordingly. I am arranging for a copy of a note setting out the position to be sent to the hon. Member.

The proposals for the new arrangements for financing clergy pensions come with the support of the Church Commissioners, the Church of England Pensions Board, the Central Board of Finance, the Diocesan Boards of Finance and the General Synod, which gave final approval to the draft measure in November 1996 on an almost unanimous vote. The proposals reflect detailed and prolonged consultations and independent actuarial advice.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Dangerous Driving (Pleas)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how many occasions, in the last year for which figures are available, the Crown Prosecution Service acted on the suggestion of a defendant that in exchange for pleading guilty to the charge of careless and inconsiderate driving, proceedings against the defendant on the charge of causing death by dangerous driving would be dropped; [14881]

(2) if he will list the number of occasions in the past five years on which drivers who have caused a driving-related fatality have been charged with the offence of careless and inconsiderate driving in place of causing death by dangerous driving by the Crown Prosecution Service in order to ensure that a conviction is obtained; [14877]

(3) how many occasions, in the last year for which figures are available, the Crown Prosecution Service offered defendants the opportunity to enter a guilty plea to the charge of careless and inconsiderate driving in substitution for proceeding against the defendant on the indictment of causing death by dangerous driving. [14880]

The Attorney-General: Charges in any particular case should reflect the seriousness of the offending and should give the court adequate sentencing powers. The selection of charges is governed by the evidential and public interest criteria contained in the code for Crown prosecutors; and prosecutors are assisted in relation to offences of the nature mentioned by the hon. Member by the driving offences charging standard adopted in March 1996 by the Crown Prosecution Service in agreement with the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Where the Crown Prosecution Service subsequently decides not to pursue all the charges originally preferred, this will usually be because changed circumstances have made it impracticable to proceed or have brought about a revised assessment of the evidential or public interest test.

Detailed information of the nature sought by the hon. Member is recorded only on individual case files and is not collected or collated centrally. It could therefore be made available only at disproportionate cost.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Ministerial Sub-committee on Health Strategy

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many times a year on average the interdepartmental Cabinet and Ministerial Sub-committee on Health Strategy has met since it was formed. [13376]

Mr. Freeman: In accordance with the principle of collective responsibility for Government decisions, including the need to maintain the frankness and candour of internal discussion and advice, details of proceedings of Cabinet committees are not published.

Manchester City Centre (Rebuilding)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on developments in relation to financial support from the Government for the rebuilding of Manchester city centre following the IRA bombing. [15100]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I was delighted to announce this morning that the Government will give Manchester the funds required to implement the scheme chosen to regenerate Manchester city centre. We shall provide £43 million over the next three years, in addition to £20 million of European funds announced last summer.

I expect these contributions to unlock very substantial investment by the private sector—around £345 million in total.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners' Brains

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the result of the discussions with the Department of Health on post mortem and pathology guidelines referred to in his answer of 16 April 1996, *Official Report,* column *362;* and if he will make a statement. [14420]

Mr. Sackville: Specific discussions about the disposal of body organs removed in the course of a coroner's post mortem await the outcome of a wider assessment of coroners' pathology arrangements, and liaison between the Departments on these matters continues.

Voluntary Groups

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each voluntary group part or wholly funded by his Department in the last two years for which the information is available and the amount of money received by each group in that period. [14147]

Mr. Sackville: Home Office funding of voluntary organisations amounted to £59,204,588 in 1993–94 and to £61,043,280 in 1994–95. I have placed in the Library lists of such organisations funded by the Home Office in each of those two years and the amounts which they received. The lead responsibility within Government in relation to the voluntary sector transferred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage on 1 May 1996.

Doncaster Prison (Asylum Seekers)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum seekers were held at Her Majesty's prison, Doncaster in each month since January 1996; [14596]

(2) what was the average length of time spent in custody by asylum seekers held at HMP Doncaster during 1996. [14589]

Mr. Kirkhope: Information on the number of asylum seekers detained—under sole Immigration Act powers—at Her Majesty's prison, Doncaster for selected dates during 1996 is given in the table.

Estimates for the average length of detention can be obtained only through examination of individual case records and, therefore, the information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum seekers recorded as being detained[1] [3] at Her Majesty's prison Doncaster, as at selected dates during 1996

Detained as at	*Total[2]*
31 January	*
29 February	*
29 March	*
10 April	*
31 May/7 June[4]	3
27 June	*
30 July/2 August[5]	*
4 September	*
1 October	*
5 November	*
11 December	*

[1] * = 1 or 2. [2] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.
[3] These figures include people who have been in detention for less than a month. Because of the delay in recording receptions into, and releases from, detention and the large number of persons detained for a short period, the figures should be used with caution.
[4] Port cases are as at 7 June and In-country cases are as at 31 May.
[5] Port cases are as at 2 August and In-country cases are as at 30 July.

TREASURY

Recombinant Factor 8 Blood Products

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to discuss the zero rating for VAT purposes of recombinant factor 8 blood products with the EC Commission. [11206]

Mr. Oppenheim: None. We are not permitted to extend the scope of our existing VAT zero rates under the terms of the EC sixth VAT directive agreed in 1977 by the then Labour Government.

North-East Regional Crime Squad

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from Customs and Excise about the role of the north-east regional crime squad in the cases of R *v.* Beriman and R *v.* Charrington and others; and if he will make a statement. [13584]

Mr. Oppenheim: HM Customs and Excise tells me that an inquiry was initiated into the conduct of two of the police officers after they had given evidence in the R *v.* Beriman trial. Aspects of the R *v.* Charrington and others case are the subject of an inquiry commissioned by the chief constable of Cleveland.

Value Added Tax (European Union)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the rates of VAT in each of the member states of the European Union for each of the main commodities and services. [13758]

Mr. Oppenheim: The table details the standard rate and reduced rates of VAT in each member state of the European Community, with the main items that are subject to those reduced rates. All other goods and services, unless exempt from VAT, are ordinarily subject to the standard rate.

VAT rates in the European Community (standard rates and reduced rates; and main items subject to reduced rates)

Member State	*Standard rate (per cent.)*	*Reduced rates (per cent.)*
Austria	20	10—Food; books and newspapers; public transport
Belgium	21	12—Fuel (coal only); social housing
		6—Food; books and newspapers; public transport; water supplies
Denmark	25	0—Daily newspapers
Finland	22	17—Food
		12—Books; pharmaceuticals
		6—Public transport
France	20	5.5—Food; books; public transport; pharmaceuticals
		2.1—Newspapers
Germany	15	7—Food; books and newspapers; local public transport
Greece	18	8—Food; public transport; pharmaceuticals
		4—Books and newspapers
Ireland	21	12.5—Domestic fuel and power; newspapers; new housing
		2.8—Livestock
		0—Food; books; pharmaceuticals
Italy	19	16—Certain foods
		10—Certain foods; domestic fuel and power; public transport; pharmaceuticals
		4—Basic foodstuffs; books and newspapers; certain social housing
Luxembourg	15	12—Fuel (other than gas and electricity)
		6—Fuel (gas and electricity)
		3—Food; books and newspapers; pharmaceuticals
Netherlands	17.5	6—Food; books and newspapers; public transport; water supplies; pharmaceuticals
Portugal	17	12—Restaurant services; certain foods
		5—Food; books and newspapers; public transport; water supplies; pharmaceuticals
Spain	16	7—Food; water supplies; public transport
		4—Basic foodstuffs; books and newspapers; pharmaceuticals
Sweden	25	12—Food
		6—Newspapers

VAT rates in the European Community (standard rates and reduced rates; and main items subject to reduced rates)

Member State	*Standard rate (per cent.)*	*Reduced rates (per cent.)*
United Kingdom	17.5	8—Domestic fuel and power
		0—Food; books and newspapers; public transport; children's clothes; new housing; water and sewerage services; pharmaceuticals

Travel Insurance

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the number of people who have taken out travel insurance from *(a)* an insurance broker and *(b)* a travel agent in the last month for which figures are available. [13658]

Mr. Oppenheim: Calculations of revenue changes resulting from the Budget proposal were derived from information on premiums published by the Association of British Insurers.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, columns *234–35, (1)* concerning insurance, if he will state *(a)* the extent of the increase in margins resulting from inflating the price of VAT-exempt insurance supplied in association with vatable goods and services, and *(b)* the normal margins in (i) the retail and (ii) the tour operating part of the travel industry; and what evidence he has that margins on insurance provided by the travel industry have changed since the introduction of insurance tax, and that such change has resulted from tax avoidance; [14112]

(2) if he will publish the data which supports his statement that there is a widespread practice of inflating the price of VAT-exempt insurance supplied in association with vatable goods and services; and if he will list *(a)* the number of instances discovered of price inflating, *(b)* the number of companies involved in price inflating, *(c)* the average value of the inflation price compared with the non-inflated price for each company and *(d)* the inflated price as a proportion of the non-inflated price. [14114]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* The practice of inflating the price of VAT-exempt insurance premiums is commonplace in certain industry sectors, including the travel industry, and cases are too numerous to list. A mark-up of 100 per cent. on travel insurance is regularly applied by tour operators and travel agents and mark-ups of this size have been reported in the travel press. The basic pricing structure of the industry—low margin on holiday, high margin on insurances—is not disputed by industry representatives. The result of this pricing policy is that a typical travel insurance policy for a two-week European holiday purchased from a travel agent or tour operators costs about £30. A similar policy can be purchased elsewhere for half that price. There has never been any suggestion that the margins on insurance products provided by the travel industry were materially changed by the introduction of insurance premium tax.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what external legal advice he took before introducing a differential rate of insurance premium tax; and with which external bodies he consulted on this matter. [11468]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* Extensive consultations with industry took place prior to the Budget concerning measures to counter VAT avoidance by various sectors that were misusing the VAT exemption for insurance. However, as is usual with tax-raising Budget measures, no external consultation took place on the insurance premium tax rate changes before the Budget announcement. Since that announcement, Ministers and officials have had numerous meetings with representative bodies for those affected by these changes.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the advantages enjoyed by insurers, brokers and agents over independent travel agencies in respect of rates of insurance premium tax; and if he will make it his policy to impose a common rate of tax in the holiday insurance market. [13342]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* I have received a number of representations about the proposal to apply a higher rate of insurance premium tax to travel insurance sold through travel agents. This is an important element of the proposed higher rate which will address, on a wider front, the current VAT loss caused by certain suppliers applying disproportionately high margins to VAT-exempt insurance when sold with vatable goods and services. Since this VAT loss cannot arise when insurance is sold in isolation by insurers or specialist insurance intermediaries, such sales have not been included within the scope of the higher rate.

Value Added Tax (Isle of Man)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much value added tax is paid by the Government of the Isle of Man to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement. [13873]

Mr. Oppenheim: In normal circumstances, the Government of the Isle of Man do not pay any VAT to the Exchequer, but under the revenue-sharing agreement of the Isle of Man Act 1979, the Isle of Man has contributed the following amounts of net VAT receipts during the past three financial years.

1993–94: £20,157,399

1994–95: £24,100,764

1995–96: £22,481,096.

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14945]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Bournemouth is sharing fully in the success of the British economy, which is enjoying a combination of low inflation, falling unemployment, low mortgage rates and rising living standards not seen for a

generation. Claimant unemployment in Bournemouth has halved in the past four years, from 11.9 per cent. of the work force in December 1992 to 5.8 per cent. in December 1996, and is now well below the national average. The Treasury does not provide resources directly to local areas.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlie the decision of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to decline to allow exemption from landfill tax for all construction sites where contaminated soil is removed; how many such refusals of exemption have so far been indicated; what tax revenues he expects to raise as a result of those decisions; and if he will indicate the legal basis for those decisions. [11366]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 20 January 1997]:* In granting the exemption, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise needs to be satisfied that the applicant is carrying out, or intending to carry out, a reclamation of land rather than simply carrying out a construction project. It takes into account the presence of pollutants in the waste, the amount of waste being removed compared with the amount that needs to be removed in order to carry out the construction, and whether all the waste would be removed from an area wider than the actual construction area. Each case is individually considered, bearing in mind all relevant factors.

It is not possible in the time available to break down the number of refusals by reason. As at 6 January 1997, the total number of applications refused was 83. Applications that are not eligible for the exemption do not raise additional landfill tax revenue. The potential landfill tax payable if wastes arising from refused applications are landfilled amounted to £35,595,713 as at 6 January 1997. The legal basis for decisions to refuse an application for exemption is failure to meet the qualifying provisions contained in sections 43A and 43B of the Finance Act 1996 as inserted by article 3 of the Landfill Tax (Contaminated Land) Order 1996 (SI 1996 No. 1529).

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications have so for been received for landfill tax exemption certificates; in how many of those cases such a certificate *(a)* has been granted, *(b)* has been refused and *(c)* is still under consideration; and in how many cases of refusals applicants have lodged, or indicated an intention to lodge, an appeal. [13598]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* HM Customs and Excise has received 542 applications for landfill tax exemption certificates. Certificates have been granted for 153 applications, refused for 92 applications, and 297 applications are still under consideration. An applicant who wants customs to reconsider a refusal must ask in writing for a formal review within 45 days of the refusal. Customs has received five such requests. Applicants who initially voice their dissatisfaction with a decision may choose not to take the matter any further, and customs does not record informal indications that an appeal is being considered.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply of 23 January, *Official Report*, column 685, if his statement that eligibility for exemption from landfill tax of construction sites where land is contaminated was never intended to be automatic is consistent with Her Majesty's Government's previous statements on these matters; what recent representations he has received on this point; and if he will make a statement. [13596]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* It was, and remains, the Government's intention that all waste arising from the reclamation of contaminated land, where the reclamation qualifies for exemption under the Landfill Tax (Contaminated Land) Order 1996, should be exempt from Landfill tax. Waste arising from construction after the land has been reclaimed is not exempt, nor was it ever intended that it should be. I understand the Building Employers Confederation is in correspondence with HM Customs and Excise on some issues of interpretation of the dividing line between reclamation and construction.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications of the legal case Pepper *v.* Hart for the interpretation of the Landfill Tax (Contaminated Land) Order 1996 in the context of previous correspondence with the construction industry; and if he will make a statement. [13597]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* I understand that the Building Employers Confederation, in correspondence with HM Customs and Excise, has quoted Pepper *v.* Hart in questioning customs' interpretation of the Landfill Tax (Contaminated Land) Order 1996. Pepper *v.* Hart establishes that statements made by a Minister or other promoter of a Bill with, if necessary, such other parliamentary material as was necessary to understand such statements and their effects, may be relied upon to interpret a statutory provision which is ambiguous, obscure or which leads to absurdity. The case did not concern interpretation of a statutory instrument. In Pickstone *v.* Freemans—PLC (1989) AC 66—the House of Lords, in construing a statutory instrument, had regard to what was said by the Minister who initiated the debate on the regulations. Neither Pepper *v.* Hart nor Pickstone *v.* Freemans considered whether correspondence from a Minister prior to the introduction of the relevant legislation could be relied upon. Such correspondence does not constitute parliamentary material.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what method the overseas trade statistics listing exports of live farm animals by species have been derived for *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* 1996. [13551]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Overseas trade statistics for exports from the United Kingdom to countries outside the European Community are compiled from customs declarations made to HM Customs and Excise by exporters and their agents.

Overseas trade statistics for dispatches from the United Kingdom to other members of the European Community are compiled from returns sent by traders and their agents to the tariff and statistical office of HM Customs and Excise through the Intrastat system. The Intrastat system was established in 1993.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will arrange for the number of electors in each constituency to be placed in the Library following the publication of the final electoral registers on 16 February. [14252]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 10 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to reply to your recent question on when the number of electors on the 1997 Electoral Register will be placed in the Library. The Director has asked me to reply in his absence.

ONS are preparing a Monitor detailing electors on the 1997 Electoral Register by the new Parliamentary Constituencies. This will be published by early April 1997 and will be placed in the Library on publication date.

Nationalised Industries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the 1995–96 outturn figure for the external financing requirements of each of the nationalised industries. [14513]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The 1995–96 outturn figure for the external financing requirements of each nationalised industry was given in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" published on 26 November last year. The latest figure will be published in "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses" on 20 March.

Income Tax

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay the differences in hisestimate for the first year revenue yield from the 50 per cent. rate of income tax on taxable incomes as between his answers of 1 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *279*, and 28 January, *Official Report*, column *143*. [14490]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The main factor affecting the change in estimated yields is that the answer of 28 January refers to 1997–98 income levels whereas the answer of 1 November 1996 refers to 1996–97 income levels. Earnings are estimated to grow between the two years, which increases the number of taxpayers affected and therefore increases the yield.

Dorneywood

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the running costs of Dorneywood in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14618]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* Dorneywood is financed and administered by the Dorneywood Trust, a private trust for which I am not responsible.

PRIME MINISTER

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Prime Minister how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities, and at what cost, in the last year for which figures are available. [14463]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes my office is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General, Office of the Public Service, on 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *734–35*.

Travel Costs

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *609*, concerning travel costs, for what reasons comparable data for 1983 to 1987 are not available; and if he will make a statement. [15169]

The Prime Minister: Comparable data for 1983 to 1987 are not available because it is departmental policy, which accords with the guidance in "Government Accounting" and the requirements of the National Audit Office, to destroy financial records after five years.

Ministerial Incomes

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Prime Minister how his salary compares in percentage terms, after adjusting for inflation, with that of the Prime Minister of 30 years ago; what is the corresponding figure for Cabinet Ministers; and how much average real incomes for the population as a whole have increased in percentage terms over the same period. [15018]

The Prime Minister: The information requested is as follows:

Prime Minister's salary: decrease 48.3 per cent.

Cabinet Minister's salary: decrease 36 per cent.

Average earnings: increase 66.7 per cent.

All percentages are adjusted for inflation and are taken between December 1970—the earliest for which average earnings information is available—and December 1996.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by the Cabinet Office on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, indicating how much has been spent on legal advice and from whom it was obtained. [14533]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* No payments have been made by the Cabinet Office for external advice, including legal advice, in relation to the Scott inquiry.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in the Cabinet Office employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any capacity relating to the Scott inquiry. [14532]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The direct salary cost of officials within the Cabinet Office wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry from December 1992 to September 1996 was approximately £554,500. Since October 1996, no officials within the Cabinet Office have been wholly employed on Scott inquiry-related matters, although some officials have inevitably been involved on an occasional basis as part of their normal duties; the direct salary cost of their involvement is unquantifiable.

Ministerial Visits (Latin America)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list by country the ministerial visits made to Latin America by his Government in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996. [14854]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* Visits made by Ministers to Latin America were as follows:

Month	*Country*	*Minister*
1995		
January	Brazil	Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Portillo)
February	Brazil Panama Colombia	Minister of State Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Davis)
March	Uruguay	Baroness Trumpington
May	Argentina	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Welsh Office (Mr. Richards)
	Brazil Mexico	Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Hunt)
	Peru Colombia	Minister of Trade (Mr. Needham)
July	Argentina	Baroness Trumpington
	Peru	Minister of Defence (Earl Howe)
September	Mexico	Minister of State, Department for National Heritage (Lord Inglewood)
	Mexico	Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor)
	Peru Argentina Brazil Chile	Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr Gummer)
	Venezuela	Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (Lord Fraser)
	Argentina Brazil	Minister of State for Education (Lord Henley)
	Cuba	Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Taylor)
November	Peru Columbia	Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor)
	Colombia	Minister of Health (Mr. Sackville)

Month	*Country*	*Minister*
1996		
January	Argentina Brazil	Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Clarke)
	Guatemala	Lord Chesham
February	Brazil Chile Mexico	Minister for Trade (Mr. Nelson)
March	Colombia Venezuela	Minister of Trade at the Department of Trade and Industry (Lord Fraser)
	Brazil	Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Gummer)
April	Mexico Bolivia Brazil	Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Rifkind)
May	Peru Chile	The Lord Chancellor
	Mexico	Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (Lord Fraser)
	Venezuela Guatemala	Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor)
June	Chile Colombia	Secretary of State for Education (Mrs. Shephard)
	Argentina Brazil	Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (Lord Fraser)
	Belize	Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor)
August	Ecuador Brazil Uruguay Paraguay	Lord President of the Council (Mr. Newton)
September	Argentina Brazil Mexico Peru	Minister of State for Agriculture (Mr. Baldry)
	Colombia Costa Rica Bolivia Peru	Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Gummer)
	Cuba	Minister of State at the Home Office (Mr. Sackville)
	Brazil	Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Arbuthnot)
	Mexico	Minister of State at the Department for Education and Employment (Lord Henley)
October	Mexico	President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Lang)
November	Argentina	Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Gummer)
	Argentina Brazil	Minister for Trade (Mr. Nelson)
	Bolivia Peru	Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry (Lord Fraser)

Month	Country	Minister
December	Chile	Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Portillo)
	Guatemala	Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Nicholas Bonsor)

Chequers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many *(a)* full time, *(b)* part-time and *(c)* temporary staff have been employed at Chequers in each of the last five years; if he will list their principal duties; and if he will make a statement; [14978]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *524*, what percentage of the total budget for the running costs of Chequers has been made up by the annual grant from public funds in each of the past five years; [14977]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *524*, if he will list the dates he has been in residence at Chequers for each of the past two years; and if he will make a statement; [14974]

(4) what uses Chequers has been put to for the periods when he has not been in residence; and if he will make a statement. [14975]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* I have nothing further to add to the replies that I gave to the hon. Member on 4 February, *Official Report*, column *524*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *524*, if he will list the independent trustees of Chequers. [14976]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* In accordance with the Chequers Estate Act 1958 the trustees are:

The Lord Privy Seal, the right hon. the Lord Cranbourne DL, chairman

Sir Ralph Verney Bt KBE DL JP, the Prime Minister's appointee

The Lord Camoys DL, appointee of the Secretary of State for the Environment

Ms J C Lomas, Public Trustee ex officio

C Nunneley Esq, chairman of the National Trust ex officio.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Legislative Timetable

32. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what estimate he has made of the number of hours *(a)* on the Floor of the House and *(b)* in Committee needed to complete the Government business already announced in this Session. [13377]

Mr. Newton: The number of variables involved would make any such estimate merely speculative.

Parliament (Dissolution)

33. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what functions he discharges in relation to the dissolution of Parliament. [13378]

Mr. Newton: In my capacity as Lord President, I would expect to attend the meeting of the Privy Council at which the proclamation dissolving Parliament is signed.

Prime Minister's Question Time

34. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to change the format of Prime Minister's Question Time. [13380]

Mr. Newton: My position remains as set out in my speech in the debate on parliamentary procedure on 11 July 1996, *Official Report*, columns 631-71.

Undelivered Speeches

35. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will introduce a procedure to allow hon. Members who have attended a debate but not been able to speak to have their speeches printed in the *Official Report*. [13381]

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Parliamentary Proceedings

36. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what steps he is taking to increase the opportunities for Back Benchers to initiate proceedings in the House. [13382]

Mr. Newton: The introduction of Wednesday morning sittings as part of the Jopling reforms has substantially increased the number of occasions on which Back Benchers can initiate debates on subjects of their choice. I have no current plans for further changes.

Points of Order

37. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals he has to review parliamentary procedures relating to points of order. [13383]

Mr. Newton: None; but the hon. Gentleman may wish to draw any concerns or suggestions he has to the attention of the Procedure Committee.

Divisions

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take measures to limit the length of time permitted for Divisions; and if he will make a statement. [13709]

Mr. Newton: Standing Order No. 37(3) provides that "at least eight minutes" must elapse between the calling of the Divisions and the locking of the doors into the Division Lobbies. I do not believe that this period could be shortened without causing significant inconvenience to Members based in 7 Millbank, and I therefore have no proposals to change the Standing Order.

SCOTLAND

Ministerial Meetings

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many meetings of the Council of Minsters have been attended as participants by Scottish Office Ministers in each year since 1992; how many of these attendances related to agriculture and fisheries; and what was the total number of meetings held by the Council of Ministers in that period. [14225]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Scottish Office Ministers' attendance	8	8	8	7	15
of which related to agriculture and fisheries	7	6	5	5	13
Total number of meetings held by the Council of Ministers in that period[1]	87	94	92	81	88

[1] The information for 1992 to 1994 is contained in the 40th, 41st and 42nd "Review of the Council Work", in the secretary general's report, which forms the foreword in each of the reviews. The summary of Councils held between 1995 and 1996 is as yet unpublished but is obtainable from the press office of the Council of the European Union.

Water and Sewerage Charges

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to achieve full equalisation of water and sewerage rate charges across the north of Scotland area. [15206]

Mr. Kynoch: The annual charges for water and sewerage services are a matter for the North of Scotland Water Authority, subject to approval from the Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council. I understand that progress with harmonisation of charges to domestic customers has been made in 1996–97 and that the authority expects to make further progress over the next few years.

Psychotic Diseases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate how many people in Scotland were registered suffers of *(a)* Alzheimer's disease, *(b)* schizophrenia and *(c)* other psychotic diseases in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14662]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* Information on the number of mentally ill people with a particular diagnosis is not collected centrally. We estimated that there were around 60,000 people in Scotland with a diagnosis of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, in 1994.

Doctors' Disbursements

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the payments made *(a)* to dispensing doctors for prescriptions dispensed and items personally administered and *(b)* to non-dispensing doctors for items personally administered, by the Prescription Pricing Authority in Scotland, broken down by (i) net ingredient cost, (ii) discounted cost, (iii) VAT, (iv) oxygen etcetera, (v) container allowance, (vi) dispensing fees, and (vii) on cost and in total in each year since 1990–91. [14143]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The payments made to dispensing doctors by way of remuneration and reimbursement in respect of their dispensing activities are set out in the table. The total value of remuneration for the supply of oxygen is less than £1,000 in any year.

The personal administration scheme does not apply in Scotland and no payments to GPs are authorised by the prescription pricing division of the Common Services Agency other than those mentioned in the table or for the supply of oxygen.

Remuneration and reimbursement payments to dispensing doctors 1990–91 to 1995–96

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Number of prescriptions (000s)	1,570	1,662	1,731	1,828	1,891	1,882
£000						
Value of ingredients before discount	8,579	9,904	11,131	12,383	13,463	13,992
Value of ingredients after discount	8,221	9,457	10,701	11,872	12,880	13,421
On cost allowances	892	1,029	1,169	1,300	1,414	1,469
Dispensing fees	1,386	1,471	1,536	1,613	1,723	1,711
Container allowances	60	63	66	69	72	72
Reimbursement of value added tax	1,242	1,666	1,884	2,090	2,267	2,361
Total value of payment	11,799	13,686	15,356	16,945	18,355	19,034

Source

Prescription Pricing Division, Common Services Agency.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the evidence submitted to the Doctors and Dentists Pay Review Body regarding disbursements to doctors in Scotland. [14144]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the Health Department's evidence to the Doctors and Dentists Pay Review Body was made available to the "Health Service Journal" in October 1996, there are no plans to publish it.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Armoured Vehicles (Indonesia)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the amount and types of plastic bullets and tear gas products which were licensed for export to Indonesia in each year since 1990. [14264]

Mr. Nelson: Since 1991—the period from which records are readily available—there have been no exports of tear gas products and only one export—in 1992—of 10,000 rounds of 9 mm inert plastic training cartridge cases to Indonesia.

I must point out, however, that the computer records cannot always identify individual items on an export licence application if they are part of a larger export.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to the answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *708–709*, on the export of armoured vehicles to Indonesia, what was the monetary value of the vehicles and associated equipment covered by the export licence. [14113]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* This is a commercial matter between the exporter and the Indonesian Government.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answers of 9 December, *Official Report*, columns *29–30*, and 23 January, columns *708–709*, in respect of exports to Indonesia if he will place a list of the associated equipment in the Library; how many categories of equipment as detailed in the export control regulations are included in the export licences; and if he will list the categories in each licence. [14266]

Mr. Nelson: No. Such detailed lists are a commercial matter between the company, the Indonesian Government and the licensing authority. However, the licensability of the Alvis applications was determined under ML6 and ML3 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994.

Licensability for the Procurement Services International application was determined under ML6 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, columns *29-30*, if he will place a copy of the export licence in the Library. [14261]

Mr. Nelson: No; the licence itself is a matter between the company and the licensing authority.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *708-709*, if he will list the communications and surveillance equipment installed in the eight Tactica command and communications vehicles. [14265]

Mr. Nelson: Detailed lists of this kind are a commercial matter between the company and the Indonesian Government and disclosed only to the licensing authority.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *708-709*, if he will list the design and deployment descriptions of each of the armoured vehicles. [14304]

Mr. Nelson: The design is a matter for the company. Information on the vehicles that is in the public domain can be found in the "British Defence Equipment Catalogue".

Deployment will be a matter for the Indonesian Government.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *708–709*, relating to the training of Indonesian personnel in the use of water cannon or armoured vehicles, if he will identify the company. [14262]

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Member's original question related to the Tactica family. The company concerned is the supplier of the vehicles, Procurement Services International Ltd.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under which category the marker dye used in the Tactica water cannon is controlled within the United Kingdom strategic export control system; and if the licence granted for the Tactica covers such products when licences have previously been granted for the export of marker dye to Indonesia. [14263]

Mr. Nelson: Detailed lists of this kind are a commercial matter between the company and the Indonesian Government and disclosed only to the licensing authority.

Exports (Indonesia)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what basis his Department seeks assurances in respect of strategic exports to Indonesia; which categories of equipment are covered; and what factors determine which categories *(a)* require and *(b)* do not require assurances. [12566]

Mr. Nelson: The Government have in the past sought and received from the Indonesian authorities general assurances that British-supplied military equipment will not be used against civilians in Indonesia or East Timor.

Export licence applications are considered on their merits, taking account of all relevant factors on a case-by case-basis. On occasion, we seek assurances from the Government concerned, but this is not on the basis of pre-determined categories of equipment or factors.

Nanotechnology

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of Board of Trade what plans his Department has to develop a formal programme for nanotechnology research; and if he will make a statement. [14972]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* Nanotechnology is an enabling technology which may impact the advancement of a wide range of scientific and engineering disciplines and industrial sectors in the future. It is essential for each of these disciplines and sectors to be able to prioritise its own research into all enabling technologies, including nanotechnology, to best suit its own objectives. This is indicated by the conclusions of the foresight panels, over half of which identified nanotechnology-related topics as research priorities.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the *(a)* financing and *(b)* progress of nanotechnology research in (i) the United Kingdom, (ii) Japan, (iii) the USA, (iv) Germany and (v) other countries; and if he will make a statement. [14970]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* Two studies were conducted by the National Physical Laboratory for the DTI in 1986, and lead to the formation of the national initiative on nanotechnology, which stimulated research in the field.

The current position on nanotechnology research is concisely summarised in section 3 of the Office of Science and Technology's report "Making it in Miniature" of October 1996, which is available to Members in the Library of the House.

In the UK, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council—the major funding body in this sector—is about to review its portfolio of nanotechnology research, and will identify any actions necessary as a result.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the laboratories researching nanotechnology in the United Kingdom, and if he will make a statement. [14966]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* At least 47 publicly funded institutions have received research grants which are related to nanotechnology.

Examples of major academic centres for nanotechnology research include:

Central microstructure facility at Rutherford Appleton laboratory, which is part of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils;

Nanoscale physics research laboratories at Birmingham university and at Cranfield university;

Microelectronics fabrication centres at the universities of Sheffield and of Surrey;

National surface science laboratory at Sheffield Hallam university;

Nanoelectronics research centre at university of Glasgow;

IRC in semiconductor materials at Imperial college of Science, Technology and Medicine;

IRC in surface science at Liverpool university;

Self-organising molecular systems research at Leeds university;

Semiconductors growth research centre at Nottingham university;

Microelectronics centre at Southampton university.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the possible effects of exclusion of nanotechnology from the United Kingdom foresight project; and if he will make a statement. [14971]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* It is incorrect to say that nanotechnology has been excluded from the United Kingdom foresight programme. Several generic priorities relevant to nanotechnology have been identified under foresight with more than half of the foresight panels identifying subjects which fall under nanotechnology-related topics as research priorities.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) under what circumstances his Department provides grants for laboratories undertaking nanotechnology research; how much his Department has awarded in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [14967]

(2) if he will estimate his Department's budget for nanotechnology research in each of the last five years and the projected figure for the forthcoming year; and if he will make a statement. [14968]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answers 7 February 1997]:* Grants for nanotechnology research are available through the normal research grant system administered by the research councils; through foresight challenge; and through relevant Link programmes.

Funding is dependent on scientific quality, as judged by peer review mechanisms.

The total value of departmental funding for nanotechnology–related research over the last five years is in excess of £135 million. The major component of this is from the EPSRC as shown:

	EPSRC: value of research grants Starting in each year £ million
1992–93	12.9
1993–94	33.1
1994–95	40.8
1995–96	19.9
1996–97	22.5

Post Office (Privatisation)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of privatising the Post Office. [14236]

Mr. Page: The Government's views on the future structure of the Post Office were set out in our Green Paper "The Future of Postal Services" published in June 1994, and in my predecessor's statement to the House on 11 May 1995, *Official Report*, columns 885–86.

Coal Mines (Public Safety)

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about his responsibilities for public safety in respect of the opening up of former mine shafts and adits. [14323]

Mr. Page: The responsibility for making safe any collapse in an abandoned coal mine shaft or adit is generally a matter for the Coal Authority.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14477]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department's approach to equal opportunities ensures that, as far as is possible, all officials involved in policy formulation and in providing advice to other staff take full account of the DTI's equal opportunities policies. Five members of staff are directly involved in implementing equal opportunities policies and procedures, although they are also engaged in other activities as well. The salary costs attributed to the equal opportunities work of these staff will be £76,855 in 1996–97.

The above excludes the DTI's executive agencies. The chief executives have delegated responsibility for equal opportunities in their agencies.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to make the United Kingdom's initial declaration to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. [14386]

Mr. Nelson: The United Kingdom, in accordance with the requirements of the chemical weapons convention, will submit its initial declaration to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons no later than 30 days after the convention comes into effect on 29 April 1997.

Rom Data

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade further to paragraph 2 of his statement, "Events Surrounding the Collapse of Rom Data" placed in the Library on 19 February 1996, when he expects to make further information public; and when he expects the Department's disciplinary procedure will be completed. [14391]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The Department has completed its internal inquiries which have confirmed that there were failings in the handling of the case. The appropriate action has been taken in respect of the small number of staff whose work fell below the standard expected and the outcome has been reported to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Regulatory Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many individuals and firms have been licensed by each of the regulatory bodies created under the Insolvency Act 1986. [14792]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Only individuals may be authorised to act as insolvency practitioners under the Insolvency Act 1986. The bodies currently recognised by the Secretary of State, together with the numbers of their members they have authorised to act, are as follows:

	Number
Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales	834
Insolvency Practitioners Association	279
The Law Society	183
Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland	167
Chartered Association of Certified Accountants	123
Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland	68
The Law Society of Scotland	23

In addition, the Secretary of State has authorised 133 practitioners.

Companies (Investigations)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* the cost of each of the investigations being currently carried out under the Companies Acts and *(b)* the amounts which have been paid to each of the inspectors and the basis on which they have been paid. [14912]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The table covers all current Companies Act inspections where the inspection has been announced. The basis on which payments are made to inspectors was set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), the then Minister of Corporate Affairs, in his answer to the hon. Member on 20 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *131–34*.

Company	*Inspectors*	*Accountant inspectors costs (including support staff and VAT) £000*	*Legal inspectors costs (including support staff and VAT) £000*	*Total cost of inspection to date (including disbursements) £000*
Guinness plc	Mr. D. Donaldson QC Mr. I Watt FCA	2,397	634	3,031
Wace UK Holdings Ltd. Tinsley Robor plc European Colour plc	Mr. A. Robertshaw Mr. C. Mayhew (both departmental officers')	—	—	14
Mirror Group Newspapers plc	Sir R. J. L. Thomas Mr. R. Turner FCA	6,589	1,650	8,239

Company	Inspectors	Accountant inspectors costs (including support staff and VAT) £000	Legal inspectors costs (including support staff and VAT) £000	Total cost of inspection to date (including disbursements) £000
Chancery plc	Mr. R. Chandler ACA Mr. A. Fausset (departmental officer[1])	605	—	605
Queens Moat Houses plc	Mr. P. Phillips QC Mr. A. Burn FCA	2,455	763	3,218

[1] Excludes departmental staff costs.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is *(a)* the cost of each of the investigations being currently carried out under the Financial Services Act 1986, *(b)* the amounts which have been paid to each of the inspectors and *(c)* the basis on which they have been paid. [14914]

Mr. Taylor: Inspections carried out under the Financial Services Act are not announced and are confidential. The table lists the costs—excluding departmental staff costs—of all current Financial Services Act inspections as at the end of January 1997. The basis on which payments are made to inspectors was set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton, the then Minister of Corporate Affairs, in his answer to the hon. Member on 20 July 1993, *Official Report*, columns *131–34*.

£000

Accountant inspectors costs (including support staff and VAT)	Legal inspectors costs (including support staff and VAT)	Total cost of inspections to date (including disbursements)
1,550	330	1,912

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many auditors in each year since 1990 have filed a statement stating that they have resigned, have been removed, or have not sought reappointment. [14785]

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information could not be retrieved from Companies House records except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to implement the European Union's fifth directive in respect of placing a requirement on plc auditors to owe a duty of care. [14789]

Mr. Taylor: The proposed fifth directive has not been adopted by the European Union.

DTI Inspectors' Reports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the cost of DTI inspectors' reports which have been published since 1990 and the amounts paid to the accountant and lawyer inspectors *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each case. [14812]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), the then Minister of Corporate Affairs, gave on 24 February 1993, *Official Report*, columns *601–604*. The additional information requested by the hon. Member is set out in the table:

Company	Inspectors	Date of publication	Accountant inspectors costs (including support staff and VAT) £000	Legal inspectors costs (including support staff and VAT)Total £000	£000
Norton Group plc	R. McCombe QC J. Heywood FCA	11 March 1993	824	155	997
Astra Holdings plc	C. P. F. Rimer QC J. White FCA	7 June 1993	1,885	424	2,310
London United Investments plc C. R. Driver and Co. Ltd (in liquidation)	W. M. Gage QC A. H. Gilroy FCA	23 September 1993	1,882	400	2,283
The Bestwood plc	G. Moss QC	20 January 1994	2,523	202	2,726
Atlanta Fund Managers Ltd	J. Venning FCA				
Atlantic Computers plc Atlantic Computers Systems plc	E. W. Hamilton QC J. A. Scott OBE FCA	21 July 1994	4,704	1,860	6,565
Consolidated Gold Fields plc	R. L. Heslop QC R. P. G. Lewis FCA	29 September 1994	3,467	386	3,853
James Ferguson Holdings plc Barlow Clowes Gilt Managers Ltd	L. D. Ziman Solicitor W. M. Hoffman	6 July 1995	4,553	1,882	6,435

Supervisory Bodies (Money Laundering)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what responsibilities the recognised supervisory bodies have in respect of monitoring compliance by auditors with regulations governing money laundering. [14842]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Auditing is not covered by the money laundering regulations. Therefore, the recognised professional bodies cannot enforce compliance by auditors. However, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales has set out what it considers the relevant requirements to be, within its ethical guidance for members in practice. Departure from such guidance would constitute evidence of professional misconduct.

Further, the Auditing Practices Board is currently preparing a practice note to assist auditors in complying with the relevant requirements, including the application of auditing standards, in relation to money laundering.

Land Mines

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria he applies in respect of the granting of export licences relating to land mines; and if he will make a statement. [15216]

Mr. Nelson: The UK prohibits the export of all types of anti-personnel mines to all destinations.

WALES

Teachers, Clwyd

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the teachers in the former Clwyd local education authority who retired in each of the last five years were under 60 years of age. [14672]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested is shown in the following table:

School teachers in the former Clwyd LEA retiring before the age of 60 as a percentage of all teachers retiring[1]

	Percentage
1991–92	71.6
1992–93	70.6
1993–94	60.1
1994–95	61.3
1995–96	55.1

[1] Includes grant-maintained and independent school staff who are in the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme (TSS). Excludes those returning to non pensionable occasional service for years 1991–92 and 1992–93. Data not available for 1993–94 onwards.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14471]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry has a variety of staff involved in providing advice and information on equal opportunities, including trainers, personnel officers and legal advisors. In addition, there are staff with specific responsibility for advice in equal opportunity matters including an equal opportunities unit, and a network of agency, regional and local equal opportunity officers, for whom equal opportunities are only a portion of their responsibilities. The number of staff with such specific responsibility is therefore expressed below as full-time equivalents.

The number of full-time equivalents in the Ministry and its executive agencies with specific responsibility for equal opportunities policy, advice and implementation including the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, case work and monitoring is 16.8.

The estimated annual cost of salaries, earnings-related national insurance contributions and superannuation for these individuals for the current financial year is £356,300.

Nitrates

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *355*, what assessment he has made of the compliance with the labelling, compositional and packaging requirements of ammonium nitrate currently dispatched from the port of Tilbury. [14363]

Mrs. Browning: The Fertilisers Regulations 1991, as amended, are primarily measures to protect the purchaser, and offences relate mainly to selling or having in possession with a view to sale. Enforcement is the responsibility of local authorities. The Ministry has not assessed the level of compliance of ammonium nitrate fertiliser passing through Tilbury.

Policy Initiatives (Funding)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to which policy initiative he has devoted most funding in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement on progress with each initiative. [14669]

Mr. Boswell: Details of funding for the Ministry's various policy programmes can be found in its annual departmental reports to Parliament.

Animal Movements Computer System

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the Animo—animal movements—computer system to *(a)* commence operating and *(b)* be fully operational; and if he will make a statement on its objectives. [14858]

Mr. Boswell: The Animo computer system became fully operational in Great Britain in November 1993. Its objective is to provide a means of sending a computerised message from the member state from which animals or animal products are consigned to the member state of destination.

Rabies

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what methods or eradication will be used to control an outbreak of rabies in the urban community; [14859]

(2) what controls over pet movements will be introduced in the event of a rabies outbreak in *(a)* an urban area and *(b)* a country area; [14860]

(3) what controls over *(a)* lorry movements and *(b)* the movement of people will be introduced in the event of an outbreak of rabies in Great Britain. [14861]

Mrs. Browning: This would depend on the nature and location of the outbreak. The powers to deal with an outbreak are contained in the Rabies (Control) Order 1974—SI 1974/2212. The provisions which may be applied is an infected area—or a zone of an infected area—are set out in schedule 3 to the order.

Genetic Engineering

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect of the digestion process on genes in respect of his consideration of *(a)* the importation of genetically modified maize and *(b)* section 16 of the European directive. [14487]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* In considering the safety of Ciba-Geigy's maize, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes was satisfied that processing for food and animal feed use, with the action of digestive enzymes, would result in the substantial degradation of the DNA. However, it did not consider that the digestive process alone would be sufficient to avoid a small but finite risk arising from the transfer of an antibiotic gene in the maize to micro-organisms in the gut of animals if the maize was fed in an unprocessed form. This risk was examined by three EC scientific committees but not thought to be significant enough to warrant a ban on genetically modified maize imports into the Community.

I am not aware of any new data that would justify invoking article 16 of directive 90/220/EEC in respect of this material.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the average value of the birds involved in the recent *(a)* Ross on Wye and *(b)* Sussex outbreaks of Newcastle disease; [14617]

(2) what is the total amount of compensation that will be paid by his Department as a result of the recent *(a)* Ross on Wye and *(b)* Sussex outbreaks of Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [14616]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* This information is not yet available.

Compensation Payments (Diseased Animals)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount paid as compensation for *(a)* poultry, *(b)* cattle and *(c)* other animals as a result of the slaughter of diseased or suspected diseased animals in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14615]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* The total amount paid as compensation for the slaughter of diseased or suspected diseased animals in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Disease	£
Poultry		
1992	Avian Influenza	6,202
	Salmonella	897,918
	Total	904,120
1993	Salmonella	2,130,586
1994	Salmonella	358,910
1995	Salmonella	398,174
1996	Newcastle disease	7,346
	Salmonella	120,799
	Total	128,145
Cattle		
1992	BSE	29,211,594
	Brucellosis	116,512
	Bovine tuberculosis	683,831
	Total	30,011,937
1993	BSE	38,054,040
	Brucellosis	22,657
	Bovine tuberculosis	2,100,082
	Total	40,176,779
1994	BSE	25,382,456
	Brucellosis	48,538
	Bovine tuberculosis	2,020,773
	Total	27,451,767
1995	BSE	11,057,384
	Brucellosis	12,750
	Bovine tuberculosis	1,988,820
	Total	13,058,954
1996	BSE	6,956,362
	Brucellosis	13,359
	Bovine tuberculosis	2,283,512
	Total	9,253,233
OTHER ANIMALS		
Deer		
1992	Bovine tuberculosis	250

Droplix

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has evaluated of the effects of Droplix on *(a)* cats and *(b)* their owners. [14856]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* All data associated with applications for marketing authorisations for veterinary medicinal products, including all relevant research information, are very carefully assessed by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. No veterinary medicine is authorised for use unless it meets stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy, and the Government are advised on this by the independent scientific Veterinary Products Committee. Safety includes the health and welfare of the animal and the safety of the user of the product. Details of data submitted in support of particular products are subject to the confidentiality requirements of section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will immediately suspend the licence of the organophosphate-based flea killer Droplix. [14855]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* The Veterinary Medicines Directorate has carefully monitored the withdrawal from the market by the marketing authorisation holder of the defective batches number 21-42 of Droplix Cat and 17-27 of Droplix Dog. The VMD continues to monitor the situation very closely and there is no reason to suspend the marketing authorisation.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

"Going GM" Conferences

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many "Going GM" conferences for head teachers and governors have been held to date; and what was the cost to her Department of *(a)* each conference and *(b)* the total programme of conferences. [14683]

Mr. Forth: The Department has held 80 "Going GM" conferences since the programme began in 1992, at a total cost of some £1.1 million. The available information on costs for each conference is given in the table.

Location	*Number*	*Date*	*Hotel costs*
Leeds	1	16 November 1992	6,202
Bolton	2	12 December 1992	6,873
Sheffield	3	15 January 1993	8,164
Manchester	4	30 January 1993	7,734
Newcastle	5	10 February 1993	8,539
Newcastle	6	11 February 1993	8,539
Leicester	7	15 February 1993	4,306
Nottingham	8	1 March 1993	7,751
Taunton	9	8 March 1993	3,491
Birmingham	10	10 March 1993	8,512
Nottingham	11	29 March 1993	7,378
Daventry	12	26 April 1993	4,150
Haydock	13	30 April 1993	2,858
Maidstone	14	4 May 1993	7,894
St. Albans	15	7 May 1993	9,772
Heathrow	16	13 May 1993	10,077
Sandown	17	19 May 1993	8,019
Watford	18	27 May 1993	6,876
Bournemouth	19	18 June 1993	6,669
Cheltenham	20	28 June 1993	6,263
Exeter	21	13 July 1993	7,638
Maidstone	22	23 September 1993	4,473
Bristol	23	7 October 1993	8,908
Cambridge	24	5 November 1993	9,240
Cambridge	25	2 December 1993	9,156
Darlington	26	3 February 1994	5,392
Manchester	27	18 February 1994	8,236
Newcastle	28	4 March 1994	6,392
Huddersfield	29	14 March 1994	7,645
Harrogate	30	27 April 1994	10,454
Stratford	31	28 June 1994	7,747
Hinckley	32	5 July 1994	4,720
Stoke	33	13 July 1994	3,859
Warrington	34	24 September 1994	4,723
Penrith	35	27 September 1994	3,554
London	36	1 November 1994	6,404
Newquay	37	21 November 1994	3,522
Manchester	38	5 December 1994	9,273
Swindon	39	27 January 1995	5,446
Gatwick	40	23 February 1995	7,113
Norwich	41	1 March 1995	3,662
London	42	10 March 1995	7,327
Bournemouth	43	14 March 1995	7,044
Cambridge	44	12 May 1995	3,660
Bournemouth	45	19 May 1995	6,072
Bristol	46	5 June 1995	7,951
Newcastle	47	9 June 1995	4,046
Scarborough	48	22 June 1995	4,011
Milton Keynes	49	11 July 1995	6,365
Leyland	50	29 September 1995	5,401
Haydock	51	2 October 1995	5,892
Reading	52	9 October 1995	6,320
Maidstone	53	20 October 1995	7,779
Bristol	54	30 October 1995	8,010
Birmingham	55	10 November 1995	5,767
Leicester	56	13 November 1995	6,112
Stoke	57	4 December 1995	8,846
Barnsley	58	15 January 1996	5,589
Hinckley	59	19 January 1996	7,194
Leicester	60	25 January 1996	6,208
Elstree	61	29 January 1996	5,893
Croydon	62	5 February 1996	6,424
Torquay	63	29 February 1996	11,208
Huddersfield	64	13 March 1996	4,738
Huddersfield	65	14 March 1996	4,833
Penrith	66	30 April 1996	4,177
Swindon	67	14 May 1996	7,448
Norwich	68	23 May 1996	4,165
Stourport	69	10 June 1996	4,676
Milton Keynes	70	17 June 1996	6,551
Basingstoke	71	1 July 1996	6,760
Basingstoke	72	8 July 1996	5,155
Maidstone	73	10 October 1996	5,218
Gatwick	74	11 October 1996	6,000

Location	Number	Date	Hotel costs
Warrington	75	21 October 1996	6,103
Selby	76	15 November 1996	5,000
Derby	77	25 November 1996	6,729
Cambridge 1	78	3 December 1996	7,122
Cambridge 2	79	20 January 1997	4,500
Plymouth	80	28 January 1997	3,500
Total			513,415

Costs listed are those attributable to specific conferences. In addition, there are two contracts: one for conference organisation and support services which for the 80 conferences has totalled an estimated £526,000, the other for certain categories of mailings which has totalled an estimated £78,000.
The costs for the two most recent conferences are estimated pending receipt of an invoice.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations her Department received from head teachers registering complaints in respect of invitations to attend "Going GM" conferences. [14684]

Mr. Forth: The Department has identified some 10 complaints from head teachers in respect of invitations to attend "Going GM" conferences in the last two years. During this period, 41 conferences were held and all head teachers in local education authority schools have been invited to at least one. The information in respect of earlier conferences is not readily available.

"Coalition for Citizenship"

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the report "Coalition for Citizenship". [14688]

Mrs. Gillan: The recently formed "Coalition for Citizenship" is a group of organisations concerned with education for citizenship. I am not aware that it has produced a report. Its constituent organisations provide information, advice and support to schools in relation to citizenship and personal and social education.

GCSE Scores

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list (i) by local education authority in England the percentage of pupils in *(a)* maintained schools, *(b)* voluntary-aided and *(c)* grant-maintained schools entitled to free school meals and (ii) the average proportion of pupils in all schools excluding the independent sector in each authority, gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A to C. [14903]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and of 15-year-old pupils achieving five or more GCSE grade A to C*

England 1995–9

Local education authority area	Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals[1]			Percentage of 15-year-olds achieving five or more GCSEs grades A* to C[3]
	County/controlled schools	Voluntary aided schools	Grant maintained schools[2]	
Corporation of London	—	—	—	—
Camden	43.0	34.8	15.2	43.0
Greenwich	43.0	32.8	—	29.1
Hackney	63.8	52.6	—	25.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	54.3	30.9	—	35.3
Islington	56.3	44.2	—	22.4
Kensington and Chelsea	55.5	36.5	22.5	46.7
Lambeth	53.8	41.5	42.0	25.1
Lewisham	43.7	34.3	—	30.0
Southwark	55.8	41.5	45.6	24.6
Tower Hamlets	69.6	55.0	—	23.9
Wandsworth	39.9	30.0	33.9	32.8
Westminster	49.9	39.2	—	33.0
Barking	27.8	21.9	—	27.1
Barnet	23.0	17.4	11.8	53.4
Bexley	17.2	12.8	10.3	46.8
Brent	31.5	30.8	28.2	35.1
Bromley	20.5	17.9	12.4	50.3
Croydon	29.9	14.4	17.4	38.8
Ealing	30.1	16.6	27.4	34.6
Enfield	26.2	12.0	18.3	41.0
Haringey	47.4	29.5	—	28.5
Harrow	14.5	6.6	—	53.5
Havering	16.6	6.7	6.5	44.1
Hillingdon	17.4	4.7	14.0	40.9
Hounslow	28.3	17.9	—	42.3
Kingston upon Thames	10.6	6.6	10.0	59.9

Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and of 15-year-old pupils achieving five or more GCSE grade A to C*

England 1995–96

Local education authority area	*Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*[1]			*Percentage of 15-year-olds achieving five or more GCSEs grades A* to C*[3]
	County/controlled schools	*Voluntary aided schools*	*Grant maintained schools*[2]	
Merton	25.7	15.0	—	38.3
Newham	43.1	29.5	—	27.9
Redbridge	21.2	8.8	—	50.8
Richmond upon Thames	16.1	15.8	—	52.2
Sutton	17.7	8.9	4.5	56.4
Waltham Forest	38.2	20.5	16.1	33.4
Birmingham	41.7	32.6	21.1	32.9
Coventry	25.3	23.4	—	38.0
Dudley	19.1	25.2	14.4	44.9
Sandwell	29.1	21.3	—	26.5
Solihull	15.3	14.8	—	49.6
Walsall	30.7	19.4	10.2	32.2
Wolverhampton	28.2	22.5	23.5	30.2
Knowsley	53.3	47.6	—	23.6
Liverpool	47.0	41.6	21.7	27.6
St. Helens	30.2	26.0	—	40.9
Sefton	23.7	26.7	—	44.0
Wirral	31.9	31.9	6.4	44.4
Bolton	23.8	17.6	11.3	41.9
Bury	18.5	14.5	—	48.5
Manchester	50.8	42.2	—	27.0
Oldham	30.5	19.4	—	33.3
Rochdale	36.0	23.4	22.6	35.4
Salford	36.8	29.9	—	30.1
Stockport	18.9	15.4	—	49.0
Tameside	27.7	18.1	11.1	35.4
Trafford	22.2	17.7	20.6	48.6
Wigan	22.8	17.4	—	43.9
Barnsley	26.9	18.5	—	28.2
Doncaster	28.7	17.4	—	33.5
Rotherham	24.0	20.7	—	36.2
Sheffield	29.0	28.0	16.3	37.2
Bradford	32.7	20.3	18.9	28.9
Calderdale	26.5	18.4	10.7	39.7
Kirklees	24.2	16.7	—	38.4
Leeds	23.6	19.7	—	36.6
Wakefield	21.5	14.4	—	35.3
Gateshead	28.4	25.8	—	36.6
Newcastle upon Tyne	37.7	29.6	—	32.7
North Tyneside	23.5	22.5	—	41.1
South Tyneside	37.2	30.8	—	35.2
Sunderland	29.9	17.1	—	31.7
Isles of Scilly	7.6	—	—	73.1
Bath and North-east Somerset	14.8	13.9	—	47.4
City of Bristol	28.9	22.3	—	30.9
North Somerset	13.6	10.0	—	52.5
South Gloucestershire	12.9	10.2	—	44.7
Hartlepool	34.7	21.7	—	31.9
Middlesbrough	39.6	29.5	—	26.9
Redcar and Cleveland	29.7	25.6	—	37.6
Stockton on Tees	27.8	19.2	—	37.2
City of Kingston upon Hull	33.3	20.9	—	22.8
East Riding of Yorkshire	11.3	7.6	6.1	43.6
North-east Lincolnshire	24.8	22.6	—	32.4
North Lincolnshire	19.1	14.1	—	37.6
North Yorkshire	10.3	5.5	—	53.0
York	14.9	12.9	—	47.7
Bedfordshire	20.8	16.7	13.2	42.7
Berkshire	12.8	9.1	10.6	48.8
Buckinghamshire	10.4	3.6	10.0	50.5
Cambridgeshire	16.2	17.1	13.2	46.7
Cheshire	16.0	16.5	11.8	49.3
Cornwall	20.4	16.5	—	46.7
Cumbria	18.4	16.3	8.9	44.2
Derbyshire	19.2	14.2	11.1	42.0
Devon	18.4	15.5	10.2	44.2

Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and of 15-year-old pupils achieving five or more GCSE grade A to C*

England 1995–96

Local education authority area	*Percentage of day pupils known to be eligible for free school meals*[1]			*Percentage of 15-year-olds achieving five or more GCSEs grades A* to C*[3]
	County/controlled schools	*Voluntary aided schools*	*Grant maintained schools*[2]	
Dorset	11.5	6.5	8.8	49.3
Durham	23.3	16.3	—	36.2
East Sussex	21.1	19.5	—	43.3
Essex	19.5	11.5	12.7	43.1
Gloucestershire	16.2	9.0	9.2	50.2
Hampshire	15.1	11.4	9.9	46.5
Hereford and Worcester	11.3	7.0	6.7	44.6
Hertfordshire	14.1	8.9	9.6	49.3
Isle of Wight	21.7	19.9	—	44.5
Kent	19.0	16.9	13.8	43.7
Lancashire	26.4	17.8	8.1	42.6
Leicestershire	16.6	9.6	12.5	39.7
Lincolnshire	10.2	5.5	10.0	44.5
Norfolk	15.6	13.5	13.6	41.9
Northamptonshire	13.2	14.9	14.1	43.5
Northumberland	17.4	11.6	—	46.1
Nottinghamshire	25.3	15.5	29.4	36.4
Oxfordshire	11.2	11.0	—	45.7
Shropshire	16.3	14.8	14.5	48.0
Somerset	12.2	9.9	11.6	50.0
Staffordshire	18.0	14.2	13.7	40.9
Suffolk	15.5	10.9	—	47.0
Surrey	11.6	8.0	7.4	50.5
Warwickshire	12.2	10.6	9.4	43.7
West Sussex	12.8	10.1	—	50.6
Wiltshire	13.9	12.0	9.6	48.3
England	22.6	20.0	13.5	44.5

[1] Position on the annual schools' census date in January.
[2] Schools operating as GM on the annual schools' census date in January.
[3] Including maintained schools and city technology colleges.
Columns have been left blank where they would have contained two schools or fewer, in line with normal pupil confidentiality.

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the percentage of 16-year-olds passing five or more GCSEs at grade C or higher in Derbyshire in each year since 1992. [15162]

Mrs. Gillan: The percentage of 15-year-old[1] pupils in maintained schools passing five or more GCSEs at grade C or higher in Derbyshire in each year since 1992 is:

	Percentage
1992	36.1
1993	37.8
1994	40.9
1995	39.8
1996	42.0

[1] Age at beginning of the academic year.

Skills Research

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research her Department has undertaken to identify the skills required by industry in the past two years. [14694]

Mr. Paice: The Department commissions an annual survey of employers which asks about changing skill requirements and recruitment difficulties. In 1995 and 1996, it was published by Public Attitude Surveys Ltd. as the "Skill Needs In Britain" survey. The Department is also funding in-depth studies into changing skill requirements within specific occupations. There are in the process of being published by the Institute for Employment Studies under the banner "Skills Review".

Jobseeker's Allowance (Sanctions)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she will publish the first analysis of adjudication officers' decisions relating to benefit sanctions against people not meeting the terms and conditions of the jobseeker's agreement and jobseeker's direction; if the published information will provide a breakdown of the specific reasons for benefit sanctions; and what the practice will be for the continuing release of such information. [15134]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 10 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the publication of the analysis of adjudication officers' decisions on questions arising on claims for Jobseeker's Allowance. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Information about decisions on questions arising on claims for unemployment benefit is contained in a document entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions". This document, which is

published quarterly, provides information on all the main entitlement questions arising on claims, as well as those which might be regarded as sanctions.

The publication for the quarter ending 31 December 1996 will also include decision given on questions arising on claim for Jobseeker's Allowance. All the main questions will be shown separately, including those relating to the Jobseeker's Agreement and Jobseeker's Directions. I expect to publish this analysis by the end of March 1997.

The analysis will continue to be published quarterly and copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

I hope this clarifies the situation.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers in Kirklees retired before the age of 60 years, other than for reasons for health or disability in each of the past six years. [14621]

Mrs. Gillan: Teachers from the maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special sector in Kirklees, who took premature retirement on the grounds other than ill health or disability from 1990–91 to 1995–96, are shown in the table:

Financial year	*Number of premature retirements*[1]
1990–91	101
1991–92	101
1992–93	74
1993–94	76
1994–95	78
1995–96 (provisional)	90

[1] Excludes those last recorded in sixth form colleges.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was spent in each year from 1990 to 1996 on the teachers' early retirement scheme in respect of retirements on grounds of ill health; and what was the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female teachers covered in each year, broken down in respect of (i) class teachers and (ii) head teachers in (1) England and (2) Wales. [15157]

Mrs. Gillan: This question requires calculations which could not be carried out in the time available. I will reply as soon as possible.

School Buildings (Kirklees)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total amount of Kirklees metropolitan council's education budget, within the standard spending assessment formula, available for the repair and maintenance of school buildings in each of the past 10 financial years. [14620]

Mrs. Gillan: The amount made available for the repair and maintenance of school buildings from within Kirklees local education authority's total budget in each of the past 10 years was a matter for the LEA to determine in the light of its own priorities. No component of the SSA allocation is designated for repairs and maintenance, or any other specific aspect of education.

Quick Corporation

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the industrial tribunal ruling against the Quick Corporation on 21 January; and if she will amend the employment regulations in the light of it. [14395]

Mrs. Gillan: It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the ruling of an independent industrial tribunal in any particular case. I see no reason to consider amendment of the Race Relations Act 1976 as a result of the ruling.

Surplus Places

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *556*, concerning comments by education authorities on changes in the capacity of schools and places occupied in them, what steps she is taking to ensure that these comments on capacity are made on a basis comparable to that adopted in 1994. [14982]

Mr. Robin Squire: The annual collection of data on surplus places is governed by the Education (Information as to Provision of Education) (England) Regulations 1994—SI 1994 No. 1256. Local education authorities and the Funding Agency for Schools are required to make a return which includes information on the more open enrolment capacity of each school correct at the third Thursday in January of that year. LEAs and the FAS also provide a commentary which gives them an opportunity to record any possible changes to the capacity of schools, whether as a result of places being filled as pupil numbers rise, or removed, or new places built.

General Schools Budget

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list, in descending order, the proportion of the general schools budget not delegated to schools for each shire county education authority in the most recent year for which figures are available. [15161]

Mr. Robin Squire: The table gives the information requested and is derived from the local management of schools budget statements for 1996–97 produced by local education authority under section 122 of the Education Act 1996, formerly section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Local education authority	*Percentage of general schools budget not delegated*
Warwickshire	33.4
Cambridgeshire	32.4
Buckinghamshire	31.4
Cornwall	30.2
Oxfordshire	29.5
Derbyshire	29.3
Shropshire	28.8
Surrey	28.0

Local education authority	Percentage of general schools budget not delegated
Norfolk	28.0
Dorset	27.0
Lancashire	26.9
Gloucestershire	26.7
Wiltshire	26.5
Bedfordshire	26.4
Cumbria	26.1
Nottinghamshire	26.1
Durham	25.9
East Sussex	25.8
Kent	25.6
Northamptonshire	25.1
Hereford/Worcester	25.0
Lincolnshire	24.9
Northumberland	24.7
Essex	24.5
Devon	24.4
Leicestershire	23.8
Isle of Wight	23.6
Berkshire	23.2
Hampshire	23.1
Cheshire	23.0
West Sussex	22.6
Straffordshire	22.5
Somerset	22.1
Hertfordshire	20.9
North Yorkshire	20.8
Suffolk	20.6

Part-time Study Rules

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library the evaluation report commissioned by her Department into the effectiveness of the part-time study rules for claimants in force before the introduction of jobseeker's allowance. [15103]

Mr. Forth: There will be two reports. One will be based on a survey of unemployed claimants; the other will be a qualitative report. Both will be placed in the Library.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in her Department. [14540]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The available relevant figures are shown in the table:

Year	Number of illegal accesses
1993–94	6
1994–95	37
1995–96	19
1996–97 (to date)	30

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, her Department has recorded in the last five years. [14541]

Mr. Squire *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The available relevant figures are shown in the tables:

(a) Table 1: Computer hacking

Year	Number of illegal accesses
1993–94	6
1994–95	37
1995–96	19
1996–97 (to date)	30

(b) Table 2: Computer fraud and theft

Year	Fraud		Theft	
	Number	£000	Number	£000
1991–92	18	246	n/a	n/a
1992–93	13	51	n/a	n/a
1993–94	11	88	105	343
1994–95	8	78	89	321
1995–96	2	200	221	1,475
1996–97 (to date)	2	n/k	84	316

n/k = not known.

n/a = not available.

Modern Languages Examinations

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many candidates took *(a)* A-level French, *(b)* A-level German, *(c)* A-level Spanish, *(d)* A-level Portuguese, *(e)* GCSE French, *(f)* GCSE German, *(g)* GCSE Spanish and *(h)* GCSE Portuguese in (i) 1995 and (ii) 1996. [14853]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* The numbers of candidates in England in 1995 who took A-level and GCSE in the specified languages are as follows. The information for 1996 is not yet available.

	Number of candidates
(a) A-level French	24,648
(b) A-level German	9,915
(c) A-Level Spanish	4,262
(d) A-level Portuguese	121
(e) GCSE French	326,824
(f) GCSE German	125,417
(g) GCSE Spanish	38,503
(h) GCSE Portuguese	337

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Zaire

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Zaire. [15212]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. and learned Friend has not visited Zaire during his time as Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid the United Kingdom currently gives Zaire; and if he will make a statement. [15205]

Dr. Fox: Britain's bilateral assistance programme to Zaire along with those of major donors including the European Commission, were suspended in 1992 following concerns about economic and human rights issues. Donors have, however, continued to provide humanitarian assistance to Zaire.

In November, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development announced a commitment of £10 million following the large-scale refugee movements in the Kivu region. This commitment included an allocation of £4 million to support UN and non-governmental organisation relief in eastern Zaire and countries neighbouring Rwanda. The European Commission provided 3.7 mecu to Zaire in 1996—the United Kingdom share of this is £0.48 million.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UN Embargoes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to apply future United Nations embargoes to the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands, at the same time as they are applied to the United Kingdom. [14957]

Mr. David Davis: The Government's policy is to apply future United Nations embargoes to the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, at the same time as they are applied to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Nations embargoes are currently in force. [14959]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: There are four United Nations arms embargoes in force against Somalia, Liberia, Angola and Rwanda. In addition, the full economic sanctions regime against Iraq and the partial regime against Libya also include arms embargoes.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates on which orders came into effect for implementing United Nations embargoes in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the Isle of Man since 1979. [14958]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, in another place, on 30 January, *Official Report, House of Lords,* columns *108–109,* in which she listed the dates of the implementation of United Nations arms embargoes in the United Kingdom. The embargoes on Libya, Iraq, and Angola came into force in the Isle of Man on the same date as in the United Kingdom. The arms embargoes in Liberia, Rwanda and Somalia—but not former Yugoslavia, on which the embargo has been lifted—came into force in the Isle of Man on 21 December 1996. The only other embargoes imposed by the United Nations since 1979 were on Haiti, the former Yugoslavia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The embargo on Haiti and the FRY came into force in the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man on 20 July 1993 and the 5 June 1992 respectively. The arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia came into force in the UK on 22 July 1993.

Former Prisoners of War (Japan)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support Her Majesty's Government plan to provide to the action taken by the Association of British Civilian Internees against the Japanese Government; and what measures he has taken to ensure that the 1951 peace treaty does not obstruct the case. [14782]

Mr. Hanley: Successive British Governments have accepted that the question of compensation was settled legally by the 1951 San Francisco peace treaty. Although we cannot become involved in legal proceedings, our embassy has provided practical assistance to former prisoners of war and civilian internees when they visited Japan, and we have repeatedly drawn the attention of Japanese Ministers to the claims of the former prisoners.

Conventional Forces in Europe

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement outlining the proposals tabled by NATO in Vienna on the modernisation of the conventional armed forces in Europe. [14777]

Mr. David Davis: NATO is committed to adapting the conventional forces in Europe treaty to the changing European security environment. Our aim is to improve the security of all parties to the treaty by agreeing lower overall equipment limits; enhanced provisions for information exchange and verification; and measures to prevent destabilising concentration of forces in any region. NATO is drawing up a set of proposals to meet these objectives, which it hopes shortly to table in Vienna.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the limits set out in the conventional armed forces in Europe treaty, with particular reference to the impact of changes in the former Soviet Union. [14776]

Mr. Davis: When the Warsaw pact was dissolved, its limits for weapons holdings under the CFE treaty were divided between its former members under the Oslo agreement of 1992. The former Soviet Union's limits were later divided between the relevant successor states under the Tashkent agreement of 1992. During negotiations to adapt the CFE treaty, we and our NATO allies are committed to completing the process of updating the bloc-to-bloc structure of the treaty.

China

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will *(a)* call on the Government of China to cease their action against unregistered Christian churches and *(b)* have this issue specifically raised at the forthcoming session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. [14813]

Mr. Hanley: Restrictions on religious activity in China and persecution of those who practise outside the official church framework are causes for great concern. We and our EU partners continue to urge the Chinese authorities to regard freedom of worship as fulfilling a basic human need, not as a threat. In the light of this and other concerns, we and our EU partners are giving careful consideration to our position at the 1997 United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will call on the Government of China to release Bishop Zeng Jingmu from prison in Jiangxi province and to ensure he receives adequate medical treatment. [14816]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 27 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *292*.

Turkey

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government plan to take to encourage the Government of Turkey to release Melek Akyol and Soner Onder. [14787]

Mr. David Davis: Our officials in Ankara raised Mr. Onder's case with the Turkish authorities before his trial, and reminded them of the widespread concern about his sentence. We last raised the case of Melek Akyol in September 1996. We will continue to monitor both cases.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what account Her Majesty's Government will take of the Turkish Government's treatment of its Christian minorities, with special reference to Syriacs and Armenians, in assessing its policy on Turkey's admission into the European Union. [14788]

Mr. Davis: The broad criteria for membership of the European Union were set out in the Copenhagen conclusions of 1993. They include the

"stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities".

All countries wishing to join the EU, including Turkey, will need to meet these criteria.

Arms Supplies (Rwanda)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 December, *Official Report*, columns *636-37*, by what means the United Nations special commission on arms supplies to Rwanda conveyed its opinion on the co-operation received from the United Kingdom Government to his Department. [14962]

Mr. David Davis: The chairman of the commission of inquiry into arms flows to Rwanda wrote to the United Kingdom permanent representative to the United Nations on 17 December to convey his appreciation for the co-operation extended to the commission by HM Customs and Excise and the Ministry of Defence. A copy of this letter has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what financial contribution Her Majesty's Government have made towards the running costs of the United Nations special commission on arms supplies to Rwanda. [14960]

Mr. Davis: The United Nations commission of inquiry into arms flows to Rwanda has been allocated $1,578,200 from the UN regular budget since its inception in 1995. The United Kingdom contributes 5.32 per cent. to the regular budget and has therefore contributed approximately £84,000.

Falkland Islands (Oil Revenues)

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter from the Falkland Island councillors addressed to the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), and dated 8 December 1994, concerning oil revenues. [14894]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Copies of this letter have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Iran

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to express concern about the death of the Rev. Mohammed Bagher Yusefi in Iran in 1996 at this year's session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission; and what further action Her Majesty's Government will be taking to communicate concern to the Iranian Government about the deaths of Iranian Church leaders in the last three years. [14904]

Mr. Hanley: We were deeply concerned by the death of Mr. Yusefi and have recently raised his case with the Iranians. We take a very serious view of human rights abuses in Iran. We are still, with EU partners, preparing our position for this year's session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. We will continue to press for tough resolutions and statements on Iran through EU and UN machinery until clear evidence of improved Iranian behaviour emerges.

Consul (Krakow)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to appoint a consul located in the city of Krakow. [14309]

Mr. Hanley: The appointment of an honorary consul in Krakow was approved in principle but the candidate was unable to take up the post. It is now our intention to make an appointment by the end of 1997.

TRANSPORT

Light Rapid Transit Systems

8. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the criteria he applies in assessing financial support for light rapid transit systems. [13352]

Mr. Watts: To qualify for funding through section 56 grant, a light rail scheme must be shown to be able to operate at a profit, and the benefits of the system to non-users must be greater than the funding gap.

Crime (London Underground)

16. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to tackle crime and its causes on the London Underground. [13360]

Mr. Bowis: Recorded crime on the underground has fallen in six of the last seven years as a result of measures taken by London Transport, The british transport police, local authorities and the Government. I have established and chair a secure stations national steering group which will be promoting safety measures for passengers and staff at rail and underground stations.

Road Improvements (Thames Gateway)

17. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his current priorities are for road improvements in the Thames gateway area. [13361]

Mr. Bowis: The "Transport Strategy for London" and the "Thames Gateway Planning Framework" outline road improvements for the Thames gateway area. Major priorities are improvements to the A13, trunk roads in north-west Kent and the proposed package of east Thames crossings.

Rail Privatisation

18. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many former British Rail train operating companies are now in private hands. [13362]

Mr. Watts: Eighteen franchises are now being operated by private sector franchisees.

European Transport Network

19. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet his European Union counterparts to discuss support for regional transport systems feeding into the European network. [13363]

Sir George Young: I have no plans to do so, but my noble Friend the Viscount Goschen, who is the designated Minister for European transport matters, plans to attend the European Transport Council meeting to be held on 11 and 12 March.

Dartford-Thurrock Toll Crossing

20. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions his Department has held in respect of future charges on the Dartford-Thurrock toll crossing. [13364]

Mr. Watts: None.

Dorchester Relief Road

21. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the limit of Government support for roads funded by private finance initiatives sponsored by local councils; and what account he will take of this limit in determining whether to support a bid to build the Dorchester relief road under the private finance initiative. [13365]

Mr. Watts: The regulations for local authority PFI enable authorities to build any self-financing schemes which meet specified risk transfer tests. For schemes where local authorities will be purchasers of design, build, finance and operate services, assistance with future payments can be given through a notional credit approval. The Treasury has agreed to initial resources of £200 million for notional credit approvals to English local authority PFI schemes in 1997–98.

This includes £35 million for transport projects in 1997–98. I stress that this is an initial and provisional figure. Provisional quotas may be redistributed if local authorities have more success in some project areas than others in generating acceptable PFI projects.

A number of highway authorities, including Dorset county council, have expressed their interest in developing DBFO schemes. If satisfactory business cases are proposed, the Department of Transport will seek Treasury agreement to the notional credit approvals which may be required.

Public Transport

22. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of journeys are made by public transport in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* the rest of the European Union. [13366]

Sir George Young: The information available for the rest of the EU suggests that travel by car accounted for 84 per cent. of passenger kilometres in 1994, compared to 16 per cent. for bus and rail travel. Equivalent figures for Great Britain are 89 per cent. and 11 per cent. respectively.

Railway Infrastructure (Investment)

23. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to encourage investment in the railway infrastructure. [13367]

Mr. Watts: Privatisation of Railtrack, the rail infrastructure provider, has freed rail investment from the constraints of public sector funding. Investment can now be planned and made in response to commercial need. Railtrack has every incentive to invest in the rail network because of the contractual matrix set up between it and the rail operators—including a challenging performance regime.

Railtrack is due to publish its network management statement shortly which will contain detailed plans of how Railtrack intends to spend money. Progress will be monitored closely by the Rail Regulator.

Trackside Litter

24. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made in establishing who is responsible for clearing litter from the sides of railway track; and if he will make a statement on the current extent of trackside litter. [13368]

Mr. Watts: Where station leases have been granted by Railtrack, train operating companies are responsible for litter collection on these stations and for a distance of 110 yds from the ends of the platforms. Railtrack is responsible for cleaning the tracks and embankments—beyond stations—and for the major stations it operates. My Department and the Department of the Environment intend to make orders which will make it clear who has the statutory responsibility for litter clearance. The current extent of trackside litter is a matter for train operators and Railtrack.

Road Maintenance

25. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice he has received from the Highways Agency in respect of the backlog in road maintenance. [13369]

Mr. Watts: The trunk road network is in a good condition, as confirmed by the latest national road maintenance condition survey. Only 3.9 per cent. of motorways and 7.3 per cent. of all-purpose trunk roads have less than zero residual life. The target agreed in 1991 was for the proportion of trunk roads with less than zero residual life to be between 7 and 8 per cent.

Car Use

26. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the growth in *(a)* the number of cars and *(b)* the number of passenger car miles travelled by 2010. [13370]

Sir George Young: Based on the national road traffic forecasts published in 1989, and with no changes in policy, my Department estimates the number of cars in Great Britain will increase from about 22 million in 1997 by between 19 and 27 per cent. by 2010 and that the number of passenger car miles travelled will increase by between 21 and 32 per cent. by 2010.

Traffic Congestion (Costs)

28. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the costs to British businesses of traffic congestion. [13372]

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Callaghan) on 25 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *13*.

Channel Tunnel Rail Services

29. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the time scale for introducing through rail services from the channel tunnel to Yorkshire and the north-east of England. [13373]

Mr. Watts: I understand from Eurostar (UK) Ltd. that it intends to begin its international service along the east coast main line in early July.

Lorry Weights

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many responses he has had to the consultation on lorry weight proposals. [13371]

Mr. Watts: To date, my Department has received 62 formal responses to the consultation document on lorry weights.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations and from whom he has received to date in his consultations on the introduction of 44-tonne lorries; and if he will list whether they are for or against their introduction. [13553]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* To date, there have been 26 formal responses to the consultation document. Those in favour of 44 tonnes came from: Forest Enterprise, Co-operative Union Ltd., West Sussex county council, Cumbria county council, Tees Valley joint strategy unit, Kent county council, Warwickshire county council, Commercial Motor Magazine, Food and Drink Federation, T. Brady and Son Ltd., Magnox Electric plc, CAIB UK Ltd., Transport Resources International and Westward Commercial Vehicles Ltd., as well as two members of the public.

Those against came from the hon. Members for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva), South Norfolk council, Liverpool John Moores university, GMB, the Chiltern Society, the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, Great Yarmouth borough council and one member of the public.

The Institute of Trading Standards Administration has made a formal response but expressed no opinion.

In addition, several right hon. and hon. Members have recently written about correspondence from their constituents on the subject.

The consultation period closes on 14 February.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many spot checks were undertaken by the Vehicle Inspectorate on the noise levels emitted by heavy goods vehicles during the last year for which figures are available. [15349]

Mr. Bowis: The Vehicle Inspectorate does not carry out such checks.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what use his Department and its agencies make

of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14796]

Mr. Bowis: My Department collects postcode information as part of a number of statistical surveys, and in the case of the national travel survey uses postcode areas as an aid to sampling. My Department makes no grants or awards on the basis of postcode area.

Motor Cycles (Provisional Licence Ban)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures his Department took to advertise the provisional licence ban for motor cycle riders which commenced on 1 January. [14911]

Mr. Bowis: On 1 January we advised all the registered keepers of learner-size motor cycles and mopeds, the group of existing riders who were most likely to be affected, of the new compulsory basic training rules. It is not possible to identify how many of those had already undertaken training or who held full entitlement to ride, and were therefore unaffected personally. Informing all registered keepers served to pass the message to learners who might use those machines.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the number of motor cycle riders affected by the provisional licence ban which commenced on 1 January. [14917]

Mr. Bowis: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on 21 January 1997, *Official Report*, columns *561-62*.

Rail Routeing Guides

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column 569 on rail routeing guides, if he will ensure that a copy of *(a)* the current routeing guide and *(b)* the revised guide is placed in the Library. [14783]

Mr. Watts: The introductory version of the routeing guide is being reviewed and amended on a regular basis during the introductory period. However, I will ask the Association of Train Operating Companies to ensure that a copy of the current and finalised routeing guide is placed in the Library.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what account his Department has taken of the presence of otters at Rack marsh on the River Lambourn in determining the route of the Newbury bypass; and if he will make a statement. [15131]

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency was aware that otters were expected to migrate back to this area and worked with the Environment Agency over measurers to encourage their return with some success. In support of this work, and in line with our commitment to protect wildlife, the Highways Agency will be incorporating otter crossings through the bypass embankment at various suitable locations. The Highways Agency will continue to liaise with the Environment Agency on this matter.

Motor Vehicles

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new private motor vehicles have been licensed in the United Kingdom in the last five years. [15180]

Mr. Bowis: Figures given in the table show new registrations in Great Britain and Northern Ireland for private vehicles over the period 1992–1996. No breakdown is available for the Northern Ireland figures.

New motor vehicles 1992–96 Great Britain (in thousands)

Year	Private and light goods	Motor cycles scooters and mopeds	Other vehicles	All vehicles	Of which body type cars	Percentage company cars
1992	1694.4	65.6	141.8	1901.8	1599.1	52
1993	1853.4	58.4	162.2	2074	1776.5	51
1994	1991.7	64.6	192.7	2249	1906.4	52
1995	2024	68.9	213.6	2306.5	1938.1	53
1996	2093.3	89.6	227.2	2410.1	2018.3	52

Source:
DVLA

New motor vehicles in Northern Ireland (in thousands)

Year	All vehicles
1992	40
1993	44
1994	49
1995	50
1996	n/a

Note:
n/a = not available.
Source:
DVLNI.

Marine Safety Agency

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the proposed increase in the Marine Safety Agency survey fees; what factors underlie the scale of increase; with whom he has consulted on the matter; and what arrangements he has made in respect of disseminating information relating to the increase. [14697]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 10 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about the changes to Marine Safety Agency's survey fees. The survey fee rate was increased from £45 to £60 per hour on 1 February 1997. The overriding reason for agreeing this increase is that the fees generated by the merchant and fishing vessel survey service have not been covering the full operating cost, and this situation has to be corrected.

Before making the increase 55 organisations were consulted and 14 replied with comments. The change was promulgated by way of a Press Notice on 7 January 1997. A copy of the Press Notice is enclosed.

Marine Safety Agency fees change

On 1 February 1997, the Marine Safety Agency (MSA) will be changing some of its fees. The main change is that the hourly rate charged by the MSA will increase from £45 to £60. The following changes to fees charged by the MSA will also come into force on that date.

Maximum fees for tonnage measurement performed by the authorised measuring authorities will no longer be set by the MSA. The fees will be set by the measuring authorities.

Current fees for Safe Manning Certificate will be replaced with a revised range of fees reflecting more accurately the work involve.

Charges will be introduced for follow-up inspections of UK registered ships detained abroad.

All work performed on or after 1 February will be charged at the new rate.

The overriding reason for the increases is that the merchant and fishing vessel survey service has been making a large annual loss, which has to be borne by the taxpayer.

The fee increases will bring the service back into line with normal Government policy that users pay the cost of the service provided.

The new fees will be listed in a Statutory Instrument, the Merchant Shipping (Fees) Regulations 1997, covering all of MSA's statutory fees. This will be available from branches of the Stationery Office.

Notes of editors

Marine survey fee hourly rate

Government policy requires that the fees for services provided by Government should be set at a level to recover the full cost of those services, to ensure that no subsidy is provided or supplementary taxation levied. A recent review of the fees set by the Marine Safety Agency revealed that only the marginal costs of the services were being recovered with the result that the taxpayer was subsidising the services. In order to rectify the situation we needed to increase the hourly survey fee rate from £45 to 60 to bring income in line with costs. The new rate will not recover any of the past losses. Whilst the increase is significant we believe that it is still competitive against rates charged by the Classification Societies, particularly as it is inclusive of UK travelling expenses.

The Marine Safety Agency (MSA) went out to consultation with the shipping industry on 9 September about proposed changes to the MSA fees. Six weeks were allowed for consultation and responses were received from 15 organisations. Concern was expressed by the industry, particularly the fishing industry, about the scale of the increases. However, Ministers have noted that the taxpayer is subsidising the service in excess of £1 million per annum and this is the overriding reason for agreeing the increase.

Fees for detention of UK ships: follow up actions

It has been proposed that MSA should carry out follow-up inspections of UK registered ships detained abroad. The Chamber of Shipping had been consulted and commented favourably on the proposal. The intention is that these ships will be inspected on return to the UK wherever possible, but inspection may need to be undertaken overseas if the ship does not return to the UK within a reasonable period following the detention. These inspections will be charged for at the new rate of £60 per hour.

Tonnage measurement

It has been agreed that the fees for tonnage measurement by delegated measuring authorities be deleted from the Fees Regulations and left for the authorities to set individually as happens on all other delegated work apart from radio survey. Any residual work done by the Marine Safety Agency will be charged at £60 per hour. This change was proposed under the deregulation initiative on the basis that reasonable competition exists between the delegated authorities.

Safe manning certificates

The charges for Safe Manning Certificates are presently at fixed rates even where similar work has been undertaken on a sister ship or only an amended certificate is required. The new fees moved to a fairer basis of charging as follows:

	£
a) Certificate for a passenger ship	540
b) Certificates for other vessels:	
350kw and over	300
under 350kw	180
c) Technical amendments e.g. involving manning changes	180
d) Certificates for sister ships were manning requirements are identical to those for which a Safe Manning Certificate has previously been issued.	60

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MV Derbyshire

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if media representatives have been invited to be present on phase II of the expedition to the motor vessel Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement. [15158]

Mr. Bowis: Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution is discussing with the Discovery Channel the possibility of making a scientific and technical programme about the Derbyshire expedition.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names and expertise of the assessors taking part in phase II of the expedition to the MV Derbyshire; and if he will make a statement. [15159]

Mr. Bowis: The assessors taking part in phase 2 of the return expedition to the wreck of the MV Derbyshire are Robin Williams, an independent consulting naval architect, who will act as chief scientist; Professor Douglas Faulkner; John Elder, professor and former head of the department of naval architecture and ocean engineering at Glasgow university; and Dr. Remo Torchio, a naval architect who is a consultant to RINA, the Italian classification society.

Rail Tickets

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many complaints have been received by the Office of the Rail Regulator regarding the lack of impartial advice on ticket sales. [14493]

Mr. Watts: Since 1 April 1996, the Rail Regulator has received two specific complaints about the lack of impartial advice on ticket sales.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff will be involved in the proposed survey of rail ticket outlets by the Rail Regulator following his report into impartial ticket sales. [14495]

Mr. Watts: The Rail Regulator has employed a professional market research organisation to carry out the survey of rail ticket outlets. The number of staff involved in the survey is a matter for it.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research was undertaken in the form of anonymous purchase of rail tickets by Rail Regulator staff prior to the publication of the recent report into impartial ticket sales. [14494]

Mr. Watts: The Rail Regulator employed consultants to test the capabilities of station ticket offices in 1995, when all train operating companies were owned and controlled by the British Railways Board.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many railway stations will be included in the proposed survey of rail ticket outlets by the Rail Regulator following his report into impartial ticket sales. [14496]

Mr. Watts: Some 613 stations are included in the Rail Regulator's survey of rail ticket outlets.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Rail Regulator will give advance warning to train operating companies before undertaking the survey of rail ticket outlets. [14400]

Mr. Watts: The Rail Regulator has given advance warning of his intention to carry out surveys of rail ticket outlets. No prior warning is being given about the details of the surveys.

Channel Tunnel Fire

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the investigations into the channel tunnel fire to be completed. [14492]

Mr. Watts: The channel tunnel fire has raised a number of complex issues. A judicial inquiry into the cause of the fire is being carried out by the French authorities; I have no information on its timetable. Eurotunnel is carrying out its own investigation, the timetable for which is a matter for the company. The inquiry by the independent Channel Tunnel Safety Authority is proceeding as quickly as possible, but until it has progressed further and has been given access to evidence currently held for the French judicial inquiry, the authority is not able to forecast when its inquiry will be completed.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the distance between the freight train involved in the recent fire in the channel tunnel and the passenger service immediately behind was at the time that the freight train stopped in the tunnel. [14429]

Mr. Watts: Three investigations, including a judicial inquiry, are under way into the channel tunnel fire. Until all the facts have been established, it could be prejudicial to release partial information.

Overloaded Aircraft

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, columns *487–88*, how many aircraft have been found to be overloaded in each of the last two years. [14427]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Road Fatalities

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what percentage of fatalities on United Kingdom roads were due to drink-driving offences in the last year for which figures are available; [14920]

(2) what percentage of fatalities on United Kingdom roads were due simply to errors of judgment committed by sober drivers in the last year for which figures are available; [14921]

(3) how many driving-related fatalities occurred in the last year for which figures are available. [14874]

Mr. Bowis: Latest provisional estimates indicate that, in 1995, there were 580 fatalities in drink drive accidents accounting for 16 per cent. of all fatalities on public roads in Great Britain. On these same roads, there is no evidence available to assess the effect of driver error on fatalities in road accidents. However, research indicates that errors of judgment by road users, whether sober or not, is a contributory factor in about 95 per cent. of road accidents. In 1995, there were 3,590 fatalities in road accidents involving motorised vehicles.

Aviation Standards (Thailand)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the International Civil Aviation Organisation to complete its assessment of Thailand's ability to meet international aviation standards; and what advice he has given to UK passengers regarding the safety of airlines registered in Thailand. [14426]

Mr. Bowis: The International Civil Aviation Organisation safety assessment of Thailand is complete and a report is awaited. We continue to issue permits for Thai-registered aircraft to operate services to the UK. Where we have concerns about the safety standards of an airline, we pursue this through aircraft ramp checks and direct consultation with the national aviation authority concerned. If these investigations show that there is a failure to meet international minimum safety standards, we will take action to refuse, vary, suspend or revoke as appropriate these operating permits. To date, my

Department has not asked for a ramp check to be conducted on any Thai-registered aircraft operating to the UK.

Air Operating Licences

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if applications have been made by *(a)* Air Operations Europe and *(b)* Air Operations International for an air operating licence. [14428]

Mr. Bowis: No.

Vehicles (Pollution)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to decrease pollution caused by road vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [13710]

Mr. Bowis: More stringent emission standards have been introduced for new and existing vehicles, the most recent of which further reduced permitted emissions from passenger cars from 1 January 1997. As a result of these measures, pollution from road vehicles is forecast to decline until well into the next decade. Further improvements, which are currently being discussed with our EC partners with a view to implementation from 2000, are aimed at sustaining this decline against the forecast growth in traffic.

Fiscal measures are also encouraging the use of cleaner fuels. Lower tax rates are being applied to unleaded petrol and road fuel gases. It is also proposed to reduce the duty level on ultra low sulphur diesel from May 1997. The Government are currently consulting on the introduction of an incentive of up to £500 for lorries meeting stringent emission standards.

Rail Link (London)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will announce the conclusions of his Department's examination in 1996 of the proposal for a link line to be created to combine the underground and BR line services of the Bakerloo line north of Harrow and Wealdstone station with the British Rail Euston to Watford facility. [13843]

Mr. Bowis: The promotion of new rail projects in London is the responsibility of the transport operators—London Transport, Railtrack and the train operating companies.

I understand that London Transport has, from time to time, reviewed the proposal to reintroduce Bakerloo line services between Harrow and Wealdstone and Watford junction, most recently in the light of both the proposed Croxley rail link project and the recent franchising of North London Railways, but that its initial indications are that there remains insufficient demand to justify the additional costs involved. London Transport will, however, continue to work closely with the new franchisee to investigate ways of developing the route.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Claims Statistics

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims for state welfare benefits and pensions falling under the responsibility of his Department and its executive agencies were being *(a)* paid and *(b)* processed at 31 July 1996. [11296]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Benefits and pensions in payment and awaiting processing at 31 July 1996

Benefit pension	*Claims in payment*	*Claims outstanding awaiting processing*
Attendance Allowance	1,280,932	33,127
Child Benefit	[1]6,968,700	12,888
Child's Special Allowance	[2]55	Not applicable
Council Tax Benefit[3]	5,661,000	160,000
Disability Living Allowance	1,764,895	65,853
Disability Working Allowance	9,848	1,176
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	[4]237,208	30,157
Family Credit	678,648	45,314
Guardians Allowance	[5]2,147	57
Housing Benefit[3]	4,779,000	170,000
Incapacity Benefit	1,945,480	26,773
Income Support	[6]3,988,964	72,490
Industrial Death Benefit	[7]20,035	Not available
Invalid Care Allowance	344,041	4,521
Maternity Allowance	19,688	3,008
One Parent Benefit	[1]993,500	3,761
Retirement Pension	[8]9,722,000	40,544
Severe Disablement Allowance	359,929	23,981
Unemployment Benefit	[9]398,000	Not available
War Disablement Pensions	[10]267,167	39,614
War Widows Pension	59,578	1,224
Widows Benefit	[8]290,740	2,720

[1] As at 31 December 1995. Based on 1 per cent sample.
[2] As at 31 December 1995. This allowance was withdrawn in 1987.
[3] Figures relating to claims in payment are taken from the Quarterly 100 per cent. count taken on the last day of May 1996 (rounded to the nearest thousand). Figures relating to claims outstanding awaiting processing are taken from the Annual Administrative Return 1994–95 and relate to number of claims outstanding as at 28 February 1995 (rounded to the nearest ten thousand). Figures for Council Tax Benefit include second adult rebate cases.
[4] As at 1 April 1995 Figures are collected for the number of assessments, a recipient may have more than one assessment.
[5] As at 6 January 1996.
[6] As at 31 May 1996.
[7] As at 31 December 1995 and is an estimated figure.
[8] As at 31 March 1996. Based on a 5 per cent scan of the Retirement Pension Computer System.
[9] As at 9 May 1996. Based on a 5 per cent. sample.
[10] Includes request for review.
1. For the benefits and pensions being processed at 31 July data have been provided for the claims outstanding.
2. The Department publishes statistical information annually. Not all statistics are collected monthly.
3. Data on the number of Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit recipients are collected quarterly at the end of February, May, August and November. Similarly Unemployment Benefit statistics were collected quarterly.
4. Figures for Retirement Pension and Widows Benefit recipients are collected twice a year at the end of March and the end of September. Figures for Industrial Disablement Benefits, are collected annually at the end of March. Child Benefit, One Parent Benefit, Guardians Allowance and Child's Special Allowance are collected annually at the end of December.
5. Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much is being spent in the current financial year on the publicity campaign to tackle benefit frauds, broken down by parliamentary constituency. [13819]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested.

The publicity cost of the "Spotlight on Benefit Cheats" campaign this financial year has been £2.5 million. The publicity cost of the national benefit fraud hotline has been £476,000 so far, with a further £500,000 expected before the end of this financial year.

Benefit Upratings

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the value of *(a)* £500 and *(b)* £1,000 capital limits for social fund payments in 1997–98 if they had been uprated by (i) prices and (ii) earnings since their introduction. [14280]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Social fund—capital disregards

	Capital disregard	*Date introduced*	*Uprated by prices*[1]	*Uprated by earnings*[1]
Maternity/funeral payments	£500	April 1987	£760.50	£918.40
Budgeting loans and community care grants	£500	April 1988	£736.85	£851.90
Budgeting loans, community care grants and maternity-funeral payments for applicants aged 60 and over	£1000	April 1990	£1,338.05	£1,426.30

[1] The Retail Prices Index (all items) less rent, local taxes and mortgage interest payments, and the Average Earnings Index (Whole economy unadjusted) as published by the Office of National Statistics, have been used in this table. All calculations are rounded to the nearest 5p at each uprating date.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the value of the widow's payment in 1997–98 if it had been uprated by *(a)* prices and *(b)* earnings since its introduction. [14279]

Mr. Heald: The widow's payment of £1,000 was introduced in April 1988. From April 1997, the payment would be £1,504.15 if it had been uprated in line with prices and £1,703.95 if it had been uprated by average earnings.

Source:

Retail Prices Index (all items) and the Average Earnings Index (Whole Economy), as published by the Office of National Statistics.

Pensioner Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of *(a)* single pensioners, *(b)* pensioner couples and *(c)* all pensioner units were dependent on state benefits for at least 75 per cent. of their income in the latest year for which figures are available. [14269]

Mr. Heald: In 1994–95, the latest date of which figures are available, 60 per cent. of single pensioners were dependent on state benefits for at least 75 per cent. of their gross income; the figure for pensioner couples was 37 per cent. For all pensioner units, the average across single pensioners and pensioner couples, 51 per cent. received at least 75 per cent. of their gross income from state benefits.

Source:

The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1994–95.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the value of the £10 Christmas bonus in 1997–98 if it had been uprated by *(a)* prices and *(b)* earnings since its introduction; and if he will estimate how much it would cost to increase it to these levels. [14282]

Mr. Heald: The £10 Christmas bonus would be £68.35 in December 1997 if it had been uprated in line with prices since its introduction in 1972. It is estimated that the additional cost would be around £800 million.

If the increase had been in line with average earnings, the bonus would be £115.45. The additional cost would be around £1.4 billion.

Source:

Retail Prices Index (all terms) and the Average Earnings Index (Whole Economy), as published by the Office of National Statistics.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services now includes *(a)* disablement questions assessed by adjudicating medical authorities, *(b)* the assessment of war pensions, *(c)* medical boards, *(d)* medical appeal tribunals, *(e)* adjudication of disability living allowance claims and *(f)* adjudication of incapacity benefit claims. [14396]

Mr. Burt: The contractorisation of the work of the Benefits Agency medical services includes disablement questions assessed by adjudicating medical authorities and medical boards. It does not include the assessment of war pensions or medical appeal tribunals. The adjudication of disability living allowance claims and incapacity benefit is undertaken by lay staff, who are advised by Benefits Agency medical services but are not bound by their advice.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if *(a)* employees and *(b)* fee-paid doctors working for the private contractors who will be running the Benefits Agency medical services will be eligible to sit as (i) members of disability appeal tribunals, (ii) members of medical appeal tribunals and (iii) medical assessors on social security appeal tribunals for all work test appeals. [14397]

Mr. Roger Evans: Appointments to appeal tribunals are a matter for the president of the independent tribunal service, His Honour Judge Keith Bassingthwaighte, and I have communicated the contents of the question to him.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements he has made to ensure confidentiality of information during site visits by private sector companies in connection with their interest in running the Benefits Agency medical services. [14398]

Mr. Burt: The project team taking forward the contractorisation of Benefits Agency medical services will facilitate and chaperone all site visits by shortlisted private sector companies, and will ensure confidentiality is maintained.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *89*, when he expects to discuss targets and performance indicators with private sector companies contracting for the Benefits Agency medical services. [14399]

Mr. Burt: During the negotiation phase of the procurement, which runs from 20 November 1996 to 1 May 1997, targets and performance indicators will be amongst a wide range of issues discussed with the shortlisted private sector companies.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board on the implications of the contractorisation of the Benefits Agency medical services. [14401]

Mr. Burt: One of the statutory functions of the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board is to advise on matters referred to it by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Although there is no legal requirement to consult the board, its views have been sought on this issue by way of presentations made by the project team taking forward the contractorisation and by discussion with the Department's chief medical adviser, and have helped to inform the development of proposals.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects contracts for the Benefits Agency medical services to be *(a)* awarded and *(b)* implemented. [14402]

Mr. Burt: The timetable for the contractorisation of Benefits Agency medical services has recently been extended and it is now anticipated that the contract or contracts will be let by June 1997.

Following award of the contract or contracts, there will be a period of transition during which contractors must demonstrate their capability to deliver the service before a formal hand-over can take place.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance on the assessment of disability benefits he intends to circulate to the contractors who will be running the Benefits Agency medical services. [14403]

Mr. Burt: The shortlisted private sector companies have been supplied with detailed guidance on medical issues. The successful contractor or contractors will have a mandatory requirement to adhere to the guidance and to consult the Department before altering existing guides or introducing new guides.

DSS Charge Programme

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which DSS offices in Scotland have been designated *(a)* core, *(b)* flexible and *(c)* surplus under the DSS change programme. [14827]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information has been placed in the Library.

The proposed transfer of responsibility for the DSS estate aims to improve value for money, increase ability to match accommodation to changing operational needs and bring in private sector expertise in managing estates, leaving the Department to concentrate on its core business.

The Department has reviewed its future estates needs and, for the purpose of the procurement, categorised its accommodation in three ways: core means an expected continued need for accommodation over the full 20-year duration of the proposed contract; flexible means that the agency will be able, but not committed to, vacate such property over a period of years should that reflect operational needs, which does not mean a formal decision to leave the accommodation at any particular time; and surplus means it is not required from the start of the contract. The agency is currently paying for a considerable amount of unoccupied space.

Any proposed office closures continue to be subject to the normal consultation process, including ministerial approval.

National Insurance

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals would be affected if the employee limit on national insurance contributions were removed; and what is his estimate of the total extra amount that they would have to pay. [14868]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that in any one week in 1996–97 an average of 3.2 million employees have earnings above the national insurance upper earnings limit.

If the limit was removed, it is estimated that the employees affected would pay an extra £3.3 billion in contributions in a full year[1].

Notes:

[1]Assumes that the current 10 per cent. contribution rate would apply to earnings above the Upper Earnings Limit.

Back-to-work Bonus

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants have established a back-to-work bonus; how many of these qualified for a cash payment; and what is the average level of *(a)* bonuses and *(b)* cash payments broken down to show (i) jobseeker's allowance claimants and (ii) income support claimants. [15102]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Back to work bonus statistics[1]

	Jobseeker's allowance[2] *claimants*	*Income support claimants*	*All claimants*
Claimants with an accrued bonus at the end of January 1997[3]	58,000	61,000	119,000
Bonus payments made from October 1996 to January 1997[4]	2,000	1,000	3,000
Estimated average bonus payment[5]	£88.44	£78.81	£85.34

Notes:

[1] Provisional data based on claims held on the Income Support Computer System (ISCS) and Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System (JSAPS). No clerically processed claims included. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2] Claims recorded on JSAPS and claims flagged as unemployed on ISCS.

[3] Live claims on ISCS and JSAPS with a bonus accrual plus claims which have ended with a bonus accrual but no bonus payment has been made (claimants who return to benefit within 12 weeks and have not claimed a bonus retain the amount accrued during the previous claim).

[4] Claims authorised for payment recorded on JSAPS and ISCS.

[5] Based on total amount authorised for payment recorded on ISCS and JSAPS.

Information on amounts of bonus accrued by claimants still on benefit will be available from the Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiries. Figures for November 1996 are expected to be published in the summer.

Source:

Back to Work Bonus management information statistics.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications have been made for extended payments of housing benefit and council tax benefit; and how many of these have been successful in each standard region broken down to show *(a)* the numbers of registered unemployed, *(b)* those in receipt of a training allowance, *(c)* lone parents, *(d)* carers and *(e)* the duration of benefit claim. [15104]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the formal requested.

However, information on the number of applications for extended payments of housing and council tax benefits and the number successful are being processed and will be published in the "Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Summary Statistics—Update Number 2" in March. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Information broken down by client group will become available in late 1998.

Disability Benefit

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what have been the annual savings to his Department in constant prices of ending the link between disability benefit and average earnings. [1417]

Mr. Burt *[pursuant to his reply, 11 November 1996, c. 90]:* The link between invalidity benefit and earnings was broken in 1980 to ensure that long-term provision of benefit based on incapacity should be sustainable.

The additional costs which would have been incurred had invalidity benefit been increased by the higher of average earnings or prices are set out in the table:

Year	*Additional cost 1996–97 prices £ million*
1980–81	5
1981–82	35
1982–83	55
1983–84	65
1984–85	145
1985–86	175
1986–87	300
1987–88	450
1988–89	595
1989–90	730
1990–91	855
1991–92	985
1992–93	1,235
1993–94	1,420
1994–95	1,520

1. Estimates cover Invalidity Pension and adult dependency increases only.

2. Estimates rounded to nearest £5 million.

3. Estimates converted to 1996–97 prices using the GDP deflator.

4. Offsetting costs estimated using Family Expenditure Survey data.

Invalidity Payments

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *90*, what have been the annual savings to his Department in constant prices of ending the link between average earnings and *(a)* invalidity allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance, *(c)* non-contributory invalidity pensions and its successor benefit and *(d)* invalidity care allowance. [7049]

Mr. Burt *[pursuant to his reply, 4 December 1996, c. 714–15]:* The information is set out in the table:

Net savings derived from uprating in line with growth in prices only from 1980 as compared to uprating in line with the higher of the growth in prices or average earnings

£ million

Year	*Invalidity Allowance (IVA)*	*Attendance Allowance (AA)*	*NCIP/Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)*	*Invalid Care Allowance (ICA)*
1980–81	[1]—	20	[1]—	[1]—
1981–82	5	25	5	[1]—
1982–83	5	55	5	[1]—
1983–84	5	90	5	[1]—
1984–85	15	110	10	[1]—
1985–86	15	150	10	[1]—
1986–87	20	220	20	15
1987–88	30	305	25	30
1988–89	35	360	30	30
1989–90	45	420	40	30
1990–91	50	465	50	35
1991–92	55	615	60	50

Net savings derived from uprating in line with growth in prices only from 1980 as compared to uprating in line with the higher of the growth in prices or average earnings

£ million

Year	*Invalidity Allowance (IVA)*	*Attendance Allowance (AA)*	*NCIP/Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)*	*Invalid Care Allowance (ICA)*
1992–93	65	840	75	60
1993–94	75	1,010	85	75
1994–95	80	1,185	95	95

[1] Denotes negligible savings.

1. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £5 million.
2. Estimates converted to 1996–97 prices using GDP deflator.
3. Estimates for Invalidity Allowance exclude savings from individuals not currently entitled to it since it is entirely offset against additional pension, but who might become entitled if the earnings uprating was restored.
4. Estimates take account of offsetting costs in the income related benefits.
5. It is estimated that Attendance Allowance is Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance (Care) highest and middle rate. The lowest rate of Disability Living Allowance (Care) has been excluded from the calculation as it was introduced in 1992 and was therefore, never linked.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish for each local authority in England the total sums allocated for social housing investment in 1997–98 under *(a)* the Housing Corporation's approved development plan, *(b)* local authority basic credit approvals, *(c)* local authority specific capital grants, *(d)* estate action and *(e)* other programmes. [13788]

Mr. Curry: I have arranged for a table giving the data requested on authorities' approved development programme, housing investment programme and estate action allocations for 1997–98 to be placed in the Library. The table also includes provisional 1997–98 allocations for capital challenge for investment in authorities own stock, housing action trusts and the 1997–98 allocations from round 1 of the estates renewal challenge fund. Allocations for 1997–98 from the second round of the estates renewal challenge fund and under the cash incentives scheme have not yet been finalised.

Some of the resources allocated through the single regeneration budget challenge fund and city challenge will be used for investment in social housing but this element is not separately identified in the allocations made.

Planning Applications (Teesside)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the planning applications made to Teesside development corporation which have been opposed by *(a)* Stockton borough council and *(b)* Cleveland county council and the number of jobs expected to be created by each project listed. [14600]

Sir Paul Beresford: Of the planning applications considered by the Teesside development corporation, since it was established in 1987, 14 were opposed by either Cleveland county council or Stockton borough council. Of these, 12 were approved by the corporation and have led to the creation of an estimated 3,480 jobs, with a further 500 expected to be provided in due course. Two applications were not approved.

These applications, and the estimated numbers of jobs created by each project are as follows.

Opposed by Stockton Borough Council:

Approved

Teesside Retail Park[1]—1,735 jobs

H. J. Banks Waste Disposal, Port Clarence—8 jobs

Comcast, Preston Farm—1,000 jobs

Croft and Blackburn—67 jobs

Soccer Sensations, Preston Farm—3 jobs

Stevenson Mazda Dealership, Preston Farm—20 jobs

Preston Farm Business Park—167 jobs

Teesside Retail Park, Phase II—100 jobs forecast Rowing Course, Teesdale—no jobs forecast

Not approved

Wimpey Homes[1]: Preston Farm

Fenland Village[1]: Cowpen Bewley

Opposed by Cleveland County Council

Approved

ASDA and non-food retail, Hartlepool Marina—370 jobs

Jacksons Landing Retail Outlet—110 jobs

ASDA, Middlesbrough Dock—400 jobs forecast

[1]Also objected to by Cleveland County Council

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the rock characterisation facilities at *(a)* Dounreay and *(b)* Sellafield. [13711]

Sir Paul Beresford: A public inquiry has been held into the appeal by UK Nirex against Cumbria county council's refusal of planning permission for a rock characterisation facility at Longland's farm, near Sellafield. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce his decision as soon as practicable. Neither I nor my right hon. Friend is aware of any planning proposals for a rock characterisation at Dounreay.

Blight

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport regarding the implementation of the findings of the interdepartmental working group on blight; and what proposals he has to implement its findings in respect of payment of compensation. [14570]

Sir Paul Beresford: When the interdepartmental working group on blight submits its final report, I shall consider any recommendations it makes with other Ministers concerned, including the Secretary of State for Transport.

Compulsory Purchase

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to simplify the existing legislation regarding compulsory acquisition and compensation; [14574]

(2) what plans his Department has to review the compulsory purchase compensation procedure. [14571]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department is responsible for two major reviews which impact upon compulsory purchase and compensation. Firstly, we commissioned the City university to conduct research into the operation of the compulsory purchase procedures. Its final report was presented to the Department this week. Secondly, the interdepartmental working group on blight is currently looking at a range of issues which, while focused on generalised blight arising during the various stages of major infrastructure project development, also include how the current compensation code may affect popular perceptions surrounding proposals for new works.

I will look carefully at both reports and consider any case which may be made for changes to existing law and practice.

Climate Change Convention

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made at the Geneva conference reviewing the climate change convention. [14865]

Mr. Gummer: In Geneva, I urged others to follow the UK lead in meeting current commitments; strongly supported the view that the findings of the intergovernmental panel on climate change constituted a clear scientific basis for urgent further action at the widest possible level; and reiterated my call for developed countries to agree, at the third conference in Japan in December, to aim to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to between 5 and 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

My address to the conference, together with a copy of the conference ministerial declaration, which addressed most of the same key issues, is available in the Library of the House.

Oil Discharges (North Sea)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of changes in the figures for oil discharges into the North sea prepared by the Oslo-Paris commissions. [14867]

Mr. Gummer: These figures are not yet available. The draft reports on oil discharges into the North sea are still being considered by the Oslo and Paris commissions.

Voluntary Purchase Grant

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of Sate for the Environment how many tenants have received a voluntary purchase grant. [15166]

Mr. Curry: Purchase grants are paid by the Housing Corporation to registered social landlords to meet the cost of discounts to help tenants buy their homes. Grants are paid to the landlord after a tenant has completed the purchase. By the end of January eight grants had been paid. The process of purchase and grant payment typically takes some months, and other tenants intending to buy will not yet have reached the stage where grant is paid.

Tenants' Rights

Mr. Austin Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on how many occasions the Housing Corporation has intervened to ensure that a housing association complied with the tenant's guarantee; and if he will list the associations concerned and the year in which the Housing Corporation intervened; [15168]

(2) how many tenants have exercised the tenant's guarantee in each year since it was introduced. [15167]

Mr. Curry: The tenant's guarantee contains statutory guidance on the management of accommodation by registered social landlords—RSLs. It includes the statutory rights that their tenants, leaseholders and residents should enjoy. Landlords are required to comply with the tenant's guarantee as part of the Housing Corporation's overall performance standards for housing management. Failures attributable to non-compliance with the tenant's guarantee are not separately identified. The corporation may intervene if landlords do not comply with the overall standards. The corporation's annual regulation report 1995–96, a copy of which will be placed in the Library, provides information about the number of RSLs that failed to meet the overall standards and the various measures taken by the corporation.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenants exercised their rights under the rent-to-mortgage scheme in each year since its introduction. [15165]

Mr. Curry: Latest information on rent-to-mortgage activity in England since the introduction of the scheme in October 1993 is given in the table.

	Claims	*Acceptances*	*Sales*
October 1993—March 1994	152	19	—
1994–95	738	89	12
1995–96	408	41	8
April—September 1996	176	15	3

The figures to March 1994 and for all sales are of reported activity only as no estimates were made for non-responding authorities in either grouping; the figures cover around 90 per cent. of authorities.

Chorley Borough Council (Tenders)

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will require Chorley borough council to invite new tenders for its landscaping and ground maintenance work; and if he will make a statement. [15217]

Sir Paul Beresford: On 10 July 1996 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State served a notice upon Chorley borough council, setting out his view that the authority had acted anti-competitively during a competition for grounds maintenance work. My right hon. Friend has given careful consideration to the authority's response to the notice.

It is my right hon. Friend's view that, in its method of calculating prospective redundancy costs if the contract were awarded to an external contractor, Chorley borough council acted in contravention of the regulations and statutory guidance.

My right hon. Friend also considers that the authority has contravened the guidance by not informing contractors that the costs associated with the termination of leases would be taken into account in the tender evaluation. He has, therefore, today given the authority a direction which requires it to re-tender grounds maintenance work by 10 November 1997. The council must seek his consent if, at the end of the re-tendering process, it plans to assign the work to its direct services organisation.

Landscape Protection

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what guidance he has given local planning authorities to protect *(a)* the quality and *(b)* the character of the local landscape in their area; [15185]

(2) what plans he has to exclude local landscape designations from reviews of local authority development plans to take account of recommendations relating to countryside character recently put forward by countryside agencies. [15187]

Sir Paul Beresford: "Planning Policy Guidance Note 7" on the countryside and the rural economy refers to statutory and local designations. We are now preparing a revised version of PPG7, taking account of comments received during consultation on a revised draft last year, including comments on the character of the countryside and local landscape designations.

Housing Corporation Loan Portfolios

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the sale of the Housing Corporation's loan portfolios to the private sector. [15235]

Mr. Curry: I announced on 31 October 1996, *Official Report*, columns *192–93*, the Government's decision in principle to sell the loans provided to housing associations by the Housing Corporation and Housing for Wales, subject to satisfactory final bids from the private sector for the portfolios.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I are happy to announce today that following further negotiations we have chosen NatWest Markets as the preferred bidder for both the English and the Welsh portfolios.

NatWest is one of the leading private lenders to housing associations, with a strong track record in this area. Once we have completed the final negotiations on the sale, I expect a successful transfer of these loans into the private sector, and a positive on-going relationship between housing associations and their new lender.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 February 1997

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Unisex Hairdresser

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what plans he has to provide a unisex hairdresser in the House of Commons. [15184]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: At its meeting on 28 January, the Committee recommended that the existing barber's shop become a unisex operation. The Serjeant at Arms has been instructed to consult all interested parties, with a view to implementing the Committee's recommendation at the earliest opportunity.

DEFENCE

Army Manpower

1. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has introduced to reduce the manpower shortfall in the Army. [13713]

Mr. Soames: We have introduced a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention in the Army. These are already having an effect, with recruitment significantly improved on last year's performance.

Defence-related Equipment Exports

14. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is Britain's share of the world market for exports of defence-related equipment. [13728]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Provisional figures show that exporters of British defence equipment achieved around 25 per cent. of the world market in 1996, on all-time best for British industry.

Cadet Corps

15. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to encourage cadet corps in *(a)* schools and *(b)* elsewhere. [13729]

Mr. Soames: The Government are considering ways of increasing the scope of the cadet forces to allow even more young people to benefit from voluntary membership. A thorough examination of where resources can be most effectively applied is currently under way.

16. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current strength of the sea cadet, Army cadet and the Air Force cadet units. [13730]

Mr. Soames: The current strengths of these cadet forces total 22,375 adults, and 88,780 cadets. I have placed a breakdown of these figures in the Library of the House.

Royal Yacht

17. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received on a replacement for the royal yacht. [13731]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A number of representations have been received concerning the future royal yacht, including several inquiries from industry and a substantial volume of letters from members of the public.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many contracts valued at over £1 million have been signed on the royal yacht Britannia in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [14635]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* This information is not held centrally but, as an illustrative example, during Britannia's visit to Bombay in November 1993, contracts worth £1.2 billion were signed on board.

I should explain that while other contracts have certainly been completed aboard Britannia, the primary purpose of her export promotion activities is in initiating and fostering commercial contracts rather than providing a venue for the formal signature of contracts.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whom he consulted prior to the announcement on the replacement for the royal yacht. [13721]

Mr. Portillo: There were widespread consultations within Government, both at official and ministerial level, prior to the announcement on 22 January.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the commercial functions which took place on the royal yacht Britannia in each of the last three years and the companies involved; and if he will make a statement. [15010]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) on 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *2–4*.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which United Kingdom companies made use of visits by HMY Britannia in 1996 to promote their business. [15204]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) on 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *2–4*.

Royal Navy Manpower

18. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's estimate of the manpower of the Royal Navy on 1 April 1999. [13732]

Mr. Soames: It is estimated that the strength of the Royal Navy, including the Royal Marines, will be 44,000 on 1 April 1999.

Ministry of Defence Estate (Ramblers)

19. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the withdrawal of his Department's booklet in respect of the use by ramblers of the MOD estate. [13733]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 12 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *347*.

Joint Rapid Deployment Force

20. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the benefits resulting from the establishment of a joint rapid deployment force. [13734]

Mr. Soames: The establishment of the joint rapid deployment force has enhanced dramatically our fighting capability by creating a joint force trained and equipped to respond effectively and speedily to future crises.

21. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to enhance the fighting capability of the Royal Navy. [13735]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 January, *Official Report*, column *223*.

Eurofighter

22. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Eurofighter will be ready for service. [13736]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Our intention is that the first Eurofighter will be delivered to the RAF in December 2001.

Service Men (Retention)

23. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action his Department is taking to ensure that service men remain in the armed forces after marriage. [13737]

Mr. Soames: We fully recognise the importance of retaining married service personnel within the armed forces. Consequently, a wide range of incentives exists to retain and support service personnel who are married and who may have families. One of the most important is the provision of subsidised family accommodation that is located close to the service person's place of duty. These are usually in the form of married quarter estates, which allow service personnel and their families to live together in a safe and convenient community that is supported by voluntary welfare services. The armed forces also support home ownership by offering beneficial loans to service personnel and, in association with industry, a savings scheme and preferential mortgage package.

Various allowances are also targeted at married service personnel and their families. These range from assistance with boarding school education for families who are most affected by frequent moves to allowances which provide financial recompense for the disturbance caused by moving and those which compensate for the extra cost of living when serving abroad.

Chinese Military Strength

24. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent estimate he has made of Chinese military strength; and if he will make a statement. [13738]

Mr. Soames: The Chinese armed forces are the largest in the world, with a strength of about 3 million. These are being reduced in size as part of a wider modernisation plan which aims to create better equipped and more mobile conventional forces and to update China's missile forces and strategic nuclear arsenal. The size of the People's Liberation Army and of the Chinese military-industrial complex none the less means that modernisation will be a selective and gradual process.

Cruise and Pershing Missiles

25. **Sir Jim Spicer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the role of cruise and Pershing missiles in the defence of NATO in 1983–84. [13739]

Mr. Soames: The introduction of cruise and Pershing missiles played an essential part in maintaining NATO's deterrent posture at a time when the Soviet Union was modernising and increasing its nuclear forces. Deployment of these systems paved the way for the successful conclusions of the intermediate nuclear forces treaty in 1987.

Land Mines

26. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when United Kingdom forces last deployed land mines. [13740]

Mr. Soames: We do not give details of the operational deployment of mines. Any such deployments, however, would be in accordance with the international laws of armed conflict and prevailing Government policy.

Trident Programme

27. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the progress of the Trident programme. [13741]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Trident programme continues to make good progress and remains on time and within budget. The third submarine of the class, HMS Vigilant, has been commissioned and is engaged in work-up and trials prior to entering service. The fourth boat, Vengeance, remains under construction and is due to enter service early in the next century.

West Indies Guard Ship

28. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the West Indies guard ship in combating the drugs trade. [13742]

Mr. Soames: In addition to her other duties, the West Indian guard ship, WIGS, together with her Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker, makes a very considerable and valuable contribution to the fight against drug trafficking in the Caribbean. WIGS has in recent years been directly involved in the interception of substantial amounts of illegal drugs in the region.

Independent Nuclear Deterrent

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of an independent nuclear deterrent in the defence of the United Kingdom. [13722]

Mr. Portillo: Our nuclear deterrent continues to provide the ultimate guarantee of this nation's security.

Self-development Education Scheme

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to maintain at its present annual value the provision under the armed forces individual resettlement refund scheme for service men and women to participate in a self development education scheme to prepare them for return to civilian life. [15107]

Mr. Soames: The three services are keen for their personnel to participate in self-development education schemes. Two key measures by which service men and women are encouraged and assisted to obtain recognised skills and qualifications that will help them in their transition to civilian life are the individual refund scheme and the individual resettlement training costs grant.

The IRS allows service personnel to claim a refund of a significant proportion of the fees for approved education—personal development courses each year throughout their service. IRS may also be used specifically for resettlement purposes within the last 30 months of service. The regulations under which the IRS may be claimed were broadened in 1996 to accommodate a wider range of educational and vocational awards such as national vocational qualifications.

The IRTC scheme provides eligible personnel with a source of funding for resettlement purposes—for example training courses of up to four weeks—undertaken in the last nine months of an individual's service. IRS and IRTC may not be used together during the final year, unless IRS is used to help fund an examination fee for a recognised qualification in civilian life.

We have no plans at present to revise the value of these grants but, as with all aspects of the defence budget, they are subject to review to ensure that they continue to serve their purpose in the most cost-effective manner.

Devonport Dockyard

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement regarding the sale of Devonport dockyard; and if he will make a statement. [15249]

Mr. Arbutnot: I am pleased to say that we will today be signing the sale contract for Devonport Royal Dockyard PLC, DRD, with Devonport Management Ltd., DML. This document also binds DML to agreed terms and conditions on project D154, the future facilities for the provision of nuclear refuelling and refitting at Devonport.

DML will be paying £40.3 million for the dockyard. The sale represents value for money for the taxpayer in excess of £40 million over 10 years and will transfer responsibility to DML for the provision of fully operable and licensable nuclear facilities to support Trident and other nuclear submarines into the next century. It will also provide DML and its work force with greater opportunities for commercial diversification.

We have completed consultation with the trade unions and will complete once we have received the necessary nuclear and other authorisations.

I am also pleased to inform the House that, following the signature of Rosyth sale contract with Babcock International Group on 12 December, which my right hon. Friend announced to the Scottish Grand Committee on 25 November, the sale was completed on 30 January. Both these deals represent good value for money and are good news for the taxpayer.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14476]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department employs a total of 10 people in central branches to provide policy advice on the application of equal opportunities for both service and civilian personnel at a total annual salary cost of some £312,000. Additional advice is provided at working level throughout the Department and its agencies by service and civilian equal opportunities officers, many of whom undertake the task in addition to other duties. Information about the total number and cost of people employed in this latter role is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Promoting equal opportunities is something to which we attach a high priority in my Department, both among the armed forces and among civilian staff. We continue to make it clear, through policy statements and other initiatives, that this is an area where all personnel, irrespective of rank or grade, have responsibilities.

Departmental Decisions (Judicial Review)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many decisions by his Department were challenged through judicial review in Session 1995–96; and in how many cases *(a)* the Department's decision was upheld by the court, *(b)* the court found for the applicant, *(c)* the Department submitted to the judgment and *(d)* the Department appealed successfully against the judicial review decision. [14372]

Mr. Soames: Five decisions were challenged through judicial review in the Session 1995–96.

My Department's decision was upheld by the court in one case; in another case the petitioner was refused leave to move for judicial review; and, in a third, the petitioner withdrew the application, after being given leave. Two further cases had yet to be considered by the court at the end of the Session. In one of these the application for leave had not yet been heard, and in the other it was substantive application that had not yet been heard.

There were no cases in which the court found for the applicant. There were, therefore, no cases in which the question of an appeal by my Department arose.

NATO

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will conduct a study of the financial costs of NATO enlargement. [14778]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the communiqué issued by NATO Defence Ministers in December 1996, a copy of which is being placed in the Library. The relevant NATO authorities have been tasked to undertake military analyses and resource assessments

of the implications of NATO enlargement. Work is in hand to allow the UK to contribute fully to the continuing debate, in NATO and elsewhere.

Policy Initiatives (Funding)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which policy initiative he has devoted most funding in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement on progress with each initiative. [14668]

Mr. Soames: The information is not available in the form requested. Details of the Department's policy initiatives are set out in successive statements on the Defence Estimates, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Research and Development (Northern Ireland)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the *(a)* planned expenditure in 1997–98 and *(b)* actual expenditure in the most recent year for which figures are available, by his Department and its agencies on defence-related research and development and contracts in Northern Ireland in 1997–98. [13951]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Central records show that over 100 defence-related contracts were placed in Northern Ireland in 1995–96, the last year for which figures are available. Research and development expenditure is not separately identified by geographical location and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cadet Force Groups

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the curriculum of combined cadet force groups in schools. [14040]

Mr. Soames: The curriculum of training undertaken by cadets in contingents of the Combined Cadet Force in schools is similar to that given to members of the other three cadet organisations: the Sea Cadet Corps, Army Cadet Force and Air Training Corps.

The syllabus consists of 60 per cent. service training and 40 per cent. adventurous training activities. Contingents normally meet weekly on a day and time determined by the head, and usually have one or two whole days training each term. Camps are arranged in school holidays.

I have arranged for a more detailed breakdown of the syllabus to be placed in the Library of the House.

Royal Flight

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *620–21*, if he will list those locations where information on the use of the royal flight by members of the royal family is held; by whom it is held; for what purpose; and for what reasons it is not centrally collated. [15363]

Mr. Soames: Information on use by members of the royal family of aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron—and previously the Queen's Flight—is held by RAF Northolt and by RAF strike command at RAF High Wycombe. Unfortunately, given the format in which such data have historically been held, it would not be possible to derive the particular information originally sought without disproportionate cost.

Service Personnel (Shortages)

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he proposes to rectify current personnel shortages in the armed forces. [13717]

Mr. Soames: The restoration of the armed forces to full manning is one of the Government's highest priorities. We are rigorously pursuing this goal through a number of innovative recruiting and retention measures.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Refugee Camps (Thailand-Burma Border)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he proposes to take in respect of recent State Law and Order Restoration Council attacks on refugee camps on the Thailand-Burma border. [15197]

Mr. Hanley: We are concerned at reports that recent attacks by State Law and Order Restoration Council-controlled troops on refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border resulted in the deaths of at least three refugees. We regularly raise concerns about human rights abuses against ethnic minorities in Burma with the SLORC. Our ambassador in Bangkok has also raised this issue with the Thai Foreign Minister. The Government of Thailand are urgently considering ways in which to improve the security of these camps.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request the United Nations to take action to protect refugee camps housing Karen and Karennis people; and if he will make a statement. [15179]

Mr. Hanley: We are concerned at reports that recent attacks by State Law and Order Restoration Council-controlled troops on refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border resulted in the deaths of at least three refugees. We regularly raise concerns about human rights abuses against ethnic minorities in Burma with the SLORC. Our ambassador in Bangkok has also raised this issue with the Thai Foreign Minister. The Government of Thailand are urgently considering ways in which to improve the security of these camps.

The Thai Government have not requested assistance from the United Nations.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received relating to the withdrawal of Thai military protection from border camps housing Karen and Karennis refugees. [15183]

Mr. Hanley: We are concerned at reports that recent attacks by State Law and Order Restoration Council-controlled troops on refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border resulted in the deaths of at least three refugees. We regularly raise concerns about human rights abuses against ethnic minorities in Burma with the SLORC. Our ambassador in Bangkok has also raised this

issue with the Thai Foreign Minister. The Government of Thailand are urgently considering ways in which to improve the security of these camps.

We have received no indications that the Thais are planning to withdraw military protection.

China (Tiger Bones)

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of China about the trade in tiger bones. [14998]

Mr. Hanley: The UK and China are both parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. As vice-chairman of the CITES standing committee, the UK was instrumental in securing agreement at the committee's meeting in December 1996 that tiger range and consuming states should make further efforts to tackle this international illegal trade. China was present and supported that decision.

Israel

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received concerning the conclusion of the United States presidential commission on aviation security and terrorism in respect of Juval Avir's employment by the intelligence service of the state of Israel. [13937]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *[holding answer 3 February 1997]:* Mr. Aviv is not mentioned in the report of the President's commission on aviation security and terrorism of 15 May 1990.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the central Government funding, other than rate support grant payments awarded to *(a)* Kirklees council and *(b)* other bodies within the Kirklees area for each year since 1992. [14237]

Sir Paul Beresford: Funding from my Department—including funding through the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships—is provided in the following table:

£000

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*Remainder of lifetime of scheme*
Awarded to Kirklees MC						
Urban Programme	1,070	720	370	—	—	—
Urban Partnership Fund	—	1,140	—	—	—	—
Routeways to Success SRB Challenge Fund Scheme	—	—	—	890	1,420	6,210
Estate Action	2,870	4,141	3,030	1,970	2,040	—
English Partnerships	898	2,058	2,406	1,444	880	—
Capital Challenge	—	—	—	—	—	6,440
Housing Improvement Programme	11,300	11,700	8,700	9,066	9,400	—
Housing Partnership Fund	—	—	160	331	241	—
Flats over Shops	—	55	102	—	—	—
Housing Revenue Account subsidy	23,640	28,201	28,679	28,869	28,992	—
City Challenge	—	6,500	8,500	7,790	7,210	7,500
SRB Challenge Fund	—	—	—	1,020	2,720	23,820
English Partnerships	611	2,403	—	590	2,838	—
Housing Corporation	12,645	12,136	8,916	5,019	6,128	—

Housing Construction (London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number of *(a)* private, *(b)* council and *(c)* housing association properties currently under construction in each of the London borough authorities; and if he will make a statement. [14333]

Mr. Clappison: The publication, "Local Housing Statistics" shows estimates of the number of new dwellings under construction, by sector, for each local authority area in England. This includes all the London boroughs. The figures shown are as reported to the Department, either in the most recent quarter, or as projected up to the most recent quarter using reported housebuilding starts and completions information. The figures cover only new build, they do not cover properties under construction in the course of the rehabilitation of existing buildings.

Table 1 of "Local Housing Statistics" issue number 118 provides the most recent published figures. A copy of this publication is in the Library.

Children's Services (Merseyside)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reinstate the funding withdrawn from the area cost adjustment for children's services in Merseyside in April 1994. [14502]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend announced in the House on 3 February that we intend to undertake further work on the area cost adjustment and the standard spending assessment for children's social services during 1997. We will consider whether any changes are required in the light of that work.

Local Government Finance (Social Index)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account is taken of the social index in determining the Government's allocation of funding to local authorities. [14503]

Sir Paul Beresford: The social index is one of the indicators used to allocate the sub-block of the all other services standard spending assessment for services provided predominantly by non-metropolitan district councils in non-metropolitan areas. A similar index is used to allocate the other social services sub-block of the personal social services standard spending assessment.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the impact of the social index on the allocation of funding to *(a)* Harrow, *(b)* Bournemouth, *(c)* Richmond and *(d)* Merseyside. [14504]

Sir Paul Beresford: The social index is one of the indicators used in two elements of the standard spending assessments: other personal social services; and other services. The amounts allocated by each of the components of these formulae are given in the table.

Other personal social services

£ per head

	Population aged 18–64	*Other social services index*	*Morbidity*	*Area cost*	*Other PSS total SSA*
Harrow	19	4	8	3	34
Bournemouth	18	3	10	0	31
Richmond	20	1	7	3	31
Knowsley	18	–1	17	0	34
Liverpool	19	–1	17	0	34
Sefton	18	–4	12	0	26
St. Helens	19	–5	15	0	29
Wirral	18	–3	12	0	27

District level all other services

£ per head

	Enhanced population	*Population density*	*Social index*	*Economic index*	*Population sparsity*	*Area cost*	*District services total SSA*
Harrow	74	22	7	–6	0	11	109
Bournemouth	81	19	5	2	0	0	109
Richmond	76	25	1	–7	1	10	106
Knowsley	77	22	–1	23	2	0	124
Liverpool	80	31	–1	24	0	0	135
Sefton	77	20	–7	4	1	0	95
St. Helens	76	18	–7	6	2	0	94
Wirral	75	20	–5	7	1	0	98

Rows may not sum to totals due to rounding

Local Government Finance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, in respect of the assumed level and costs of capital expenditure referred to in paragraphs 4.59 to 4.61 of the "Local Government Finance Report (Surplus) 1997–98", HC 203 of 1996–97, he will state the mathematical basis used in respect of the assumed amounts referred to in each paragraph. [14591]

Sir Paul Beresford: The basis for calculating assumed outstanding debt at 1 April 1990 was set out in appendix 1 to annex VII of "Standard Spending Assessments: Background and Underlying Methodology", published by the Department of the Environment in 1990. A copy of this document was made available in the Library.

A description of the basic and supplementary credit approval data used in calculating standard spending assessments is given on pages 64 and 65 of "The Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98" (HC203). Pages 63 and 64 of the report describe how credit approval information for years prior to 1997–98 has been used to derive the estimate of assumed outstanding debt at 1 April 1997. Further information is given in "Standard Spending Assessments: Specification of Indicators for 1997–98", a copy of which is in the Library.

The formula for calculating the assumed cost of financing capital expenditure is set out in paragraph 4.64 of "The Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98". The interest rate used in the calculation is defined on page 64 of the report.

Additional information on the calculation of the SSA element for capital financing, including a sample calculation, was provided in chapter 8 of "Standard Spending Assessments: Guide to Methodology 1996–97", published by the Department of the Environment in 1996. A copy of this document is in the Library.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the link between decreasing population and relative local economic decline; and what account is taken of that link in the standard spending assessment forumla. [14506]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have not made any recent assessment of the link between decreasing population and relative local economic decline. There is no explicit indicator of such an effect in the standard spending assessment formulae. However, the formulae include the population of the local authority and indicators of economic deprivation, which might reflect any such an effect.

Children's Services

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to implement the recommendations of the York university study into ethnicity and the cost of children's services. [14501]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of Health plans to take forward York university's work on the standard spending assessment for children's social services during 1997.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recognition is made in the Government's allocation of funding to local authorities of the provision by some authorities of universal nursery education; and if he will make a statement. [14505]

Sir Paul Beresford: The element of the standard spending assessment related to the education of under-fives is based on the resident population aged 0 to four an indicator of additional educational needs, adjustments for variations in cost and boundary changes, and a deduction related to the number of four-year-olds in local authority provision in a recent year. The SSA formulae are the subject of discussions each year with representatives of local government.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has commissioned into the effect of the area cost adjustment on social service provision for *(a)* children and *(b)* the elderly; what conclusions were reached in such research; and what proposals he has for changes as a result of that research. [14507]

Sir Paul Beresford: I commissioned an independent review of the area cost adjustment element of standard spending assessment during 1996. It proposed a new method of calculating area cost adjustments which could be used for all local authority services. The review's proposals were not implemented for 1997–98 SSAs. Further work to consider the concerns that remain about the area cost adjustment will be carried out during 1997.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his oral statement of 3 February, *Official Report*, column 677, what assumptions underlay his provision of a 3.6 per cent. increase in education spending. [14793]

Sir Paul Beresford: In deciding each year on appropriate levels of total standard spending in each of the main service blocks—including education—we take into account the spending pressures facing local authorities as well as the scope for efficiency savings and what the country as a whole can afford. We discuss these spending pressures with representatives from local government. Local spending decisions, however, are entirely a matter for individual local authorities which have considerable freedom to decide on their own priorities in the light of local circumstances.

E. coli

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the incidence of E. coli in drinking water supplies in England and Wales during the latest three years for which information is available; what research has been carried out to isolate the E. coli strain which caused the recent deaths in Scotland; what assessment he has made of whether the E. coli strain in Scotland is the same as that found in water supplies; and if he will make a statement. [14592]

Mr. Clappison: There are various strains or serogroups of Escherichia coli—E. coli—bacteria, most of which are unlikely to cause infection in humans. A variety of E. coli strains are present in the faeces of almost all human beings and warm-blooded animals but the incidence of the strain associated with the recent deaths in Scotland—known as 0157—is rare although it has been isolated from cattle in the UK. E. coli in general are used as indicator organisms in checking that drinking water is free from contamination.

Water quality regulations require water companies to test for a group of bacteria known as faecal coliforms which include E. coli. The majority of faecal coliforms reported by water companies will be E. coli but there is no requirement to test specifically for this organism. Whenever faecal coliform bacteria are detected in water supplies, precautionary action is taken, usually through the issue of an advice to boil water notice. The figures for the number of times that faecal coliform bacteria have been found in compliance samples taken in water supply zones in England and Wales is as follows:

	1993	*1994*	*1995*
Number of tests	164,241	159,896	156,306
Percentage in which faecal coliforms detected	0.1	<0.1	<0.1

The drinking water inspectorate has promoted research to ensure that an effective method of detecting E. coli 0157 in water is available.

All public drinking water supplies in England and Wales are disinfected at the water treatment works and all strains of *E. coli* are destroyed by adequate disinfection. The drinking water inspectorate checks on a sample basis that adequate disinfection is in place and investigates any disinfection failures.

Social Landlords

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority *(a)* total central Government funding in 1997–98 for registered social landlords' housing programmes, *(b)* the total number of new lettings that this funding will generate, *(a)* the estimated number of new lettings that registered social landlords will be able to provide with funding received in 1997–98 from local government and *(d)* the estimated number of new lettings that would be needed in order to achieve a national target of 60,000 new lettings annually; and if he will make a statement. [14628]

Mr. Clappison: The Housing Corporation will publish in April full details by local authority area of its expenditure allocations for 1997–98 and the number of new lettings which this will generate under the approval development programme. In the meantime I have arranged for a summary table of expenditure allocations by local authority area to be placed in the Library of the House. My Department does not produce estimates by local authority area of the number of new lettings which registered social landlords will be able to provide with funding received from local government of the number of

new lettings which would be required in order to achieve a national figure of 60,000 new lettings annually. Over the decade 1991–92 to 2000–01 I expect new social lettings on current plans to be in the range of 58,000 to 60,000 per annum, in line with our estimates of housing need.

Unoccupied Housing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the number and percentage of private sector properties for each district council in England which have been unoccupied for longer than six months. [14689]

Mr. Clappison: Local authorities in England are requested to provide information on the number of private sector properties within the authority that are unoccupied, together with the number that have been vacant for more than 12 months. Data are not specifically collected on the numbers of properties unoccupied for more than six months.

The latest available figures relate to the position on 1 April 1996 and are given in the 1996 "HIP 1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

Multiple Occupation Housing (Fire Risks)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has commissioned on fire risks in houses in multiple occupation; by which organisations the research is to be carried out; under what terms of reference; from whom evidence will be taken on this matter; and when the outcome of the research programme will be available to him [14814]

Mr. Clappison: In December 1996, Entec (UK) Ltd. was awarded a research contract to undertake a study of the fire risk associated with different types of houses in multiple occupation—HMOSs. This contract followed a feasibility study carried out earlier in the year by the fire research station of the Building Research Establishment. The terms of reference for the research are to identify the factors which are most likely to cause fires in HMOSs, and those factors which increase or decrease the likelihood of death and injury arising from such fires. The initial stages of the research sought evidence from local authorities and others with an interest in HMOSs and fire safety. The main evidence will be gathered about from about 90 case studies in which the views of relevant fire brigades will be sought. Entec's report is expected in August this year.

Environmental Information Regulations

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the operation of the Environment Information Regulations 1992; how many applicants for information under the regulations over the past year have been refused the information requested; and if he will list the reasons for not providing the information in each available case. [14919]

Mr. Gummer: This information is not normally held centrally, but from a recent review of the operation of the regulations within central Government Departments, non-departmental public bodies and executive agencies, it was ascertained that during the calendar year 1996 there were at last 25 refusals to supply information under the regulations. Where cited the reasons for refusal were discretionary exemption (7), mandatory exemption (3), information not environmental (1), request formulated in too general a manner (1), and information supplied in part (1).

Private Sector Housing

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of private sector properties that fail to meet the current fitness standards and are occupied. [14690]

Mr. Clappison: The latest available information is from the 1991 English house condition survey, which found 1,089,000 occupied private sector dwellings to be unfit under the current fitness standard. Results from the 1996 EHCS should be available later this year.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what use his Department and its agencies make of postcodes for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14806]

Sir Paul Beresford: Postcodes are used in connection with the collection of some data relating to housing and other functions. They are also used in connection with the collection of data by other Government Departments and agencies which are used in some formulae for the distribution of grants. The data used have been reconsidered whenever appropriate.

Offshore Drilling Platforms

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations govern the recovery of oil from oiled cuttings arising from offshore rig and platform activities by vacuum distillation. [14871]

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* Vacuum distillation is one option for recovering oil from oiled cuttings. I understand that no such oil recovery occurs offshore, largely due to the size of the necessary recovery equipment. Where oiled cuttings are brought onshore for recovery distillation, such distillation is a process prescribed for control under the integrated pollution control regime established by part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Drax Power Station

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call for a report from the Environment agency on the proposed use of petroleum coke in the Drax power station and the possible effects of emissions of varidium and nickel on the health of the local population in *(a)* Hull and the East Riding and *(b)* Scandinavia. [14882]

Mr. Clappison: No. it is for the Environment Agency to decide these matters. It would be inappropriate for a Minister to intervene in the way proposed, since any decision the agency might make could subsequently come before the Secretary of State on appeal.

Beef Waste

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* incinerators and *(b)* power stations have been tested for emissions by the Environment Agency in connection with the burning of cattle carcases or rendered remains of BSE beasts. [15407]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency has tested one incinerator and one tyre burning plant for the burning of rendered materials, four incinerators for burning tannery waste, one incinerator for burning over-30-months scheme cattle and one for burning BSE carcases. In addition, testing of burning rendered materials has taken place at the small test rigs operated by National Power and PowerGen. No power stations burn this type of material.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions and where have *(a)* incinerators and *(b)* power stations failed to satisfy the Environment Agency with regard to emission levels in connection with the burning of BSE cattle. [15408]

Mr. Clappison: On no occasion.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the chairmanship and deputy chairmanship of the Housing Corporation. [15599]

Mr. Gummer: I am delighted to announce that Peter Cooke, who is currently deputy chairman of the Housing Corporation, has agreed to take over as chairman of the corporation for six months from 1 April. This will provide proper continuity for the corporation at time of change. Mr. Cooke has a fund of relevant experience in banking and public administration, including nine years on the board of the corporation.

At the same time, George Cracknell, who is already a board member, will become deputy chairman. He is currently chairman of the corporation's finance and audit committee. In his capacity as deputy chairman, Mr. Cracknell will take over from Mr. Cooke as chairman of the registration and supervision committee.

Sir Brian Pearse, the current chairman of the corporation, has indicated that he wishes to stand down when his term of office ends on 31 March 1997. He has led the Housing Corporation very effectively, gaining the respect of everyone in the housing world.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagement for Tuesday 11 February. [14038]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 11 February. [14039]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Building Society Conversions (Disabled People's Rights)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister which Departments have responsibility for assessing the National Disability Council's representations for action to stop building societies converting to banks without paying bonus shares to disabled people who are not the first named on their account; what response has been made to the council; what action has been taken by the Government; and if he will make a statement. [14666]

The Prime Minister: Officials from Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department responsible for overseeing building societies, and the disability unit of the Department of Social Security have been working together with the independent National Disability Council on this issue. A report of their progress was given to the National Disability Council's meeting on 27 January. My hon. Friend, the Minister for Disabled People hopes to respond to the council in the near future.

Interception of Communications

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister what role the Interception of Communications Tribunal and the commissioner have in the handling of *(a)* complaints of interceptions not authorised by warrant and *(b)* surreptitious surveillance of telephone calls by methods not prohibited by the definition of interception of the Court of Appeal in R *v.* Ahmed (1984); and what changes there have been to their role, with special reference to the area of unauthorised interception, since the statement by the Home Secretary on 7 February 1985, *Official Report,* column 1121. [15441]

The Prime Minister: The tribunal and commissioner have no statutory power to investigate allegations that interception has taken place without a warrant issued under the Interception of Communications Act 1985. That would fall to be investigated by the police. The Act, which defines the roles of the tribunal and commissioner, is concerned only with the interception of communications in the course of their transmission by post or by means of a public telecommunications system. It does not apply to private telecommunications systems. There has been no change to the roles of the tribunal and commissioner since the introduction of the Act.

Ministerial Visits (Indian Sub-continent)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report,* column *448,* who the 48 representatives of British industry were who accompanied him on his recent visit to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. [15000]

The Prime Minister: The following list details those commercial organisations who were represented on various stages of my visit to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh:

Alfred McAlpine, SAGG, ANZ Gringlays, ABI, BAT, BOC, BAe British Airways, British Council, CBI, Commercial Union, Courtauld, Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, Eagle Star, Foster Wheeler, GEC, Grand Met, HSBC, Hyder Consulting Group, ICI Paints, Kvaerner, Mott McDonald, Nat West Markets, PowerGen, Premier, Robert Fleming, Rolls Royce, Royal Sun Alliance, The 600 Group, Scotch Whiskey Association, Standard Life, W S Atkins, Asia House, Caparo Group, GEC Alsthom, General Accident, GPT, John Laing

International Ltd, Prudential, RTZ/CRA, T&N, University of Warwick, Cable and Wireless, Midland Electricity, Hardy Oil, LASMO, Nat West Securities, Siemens Plessey, Shell UK, Balfour Beatty, Barclays Bank, Barclays BZW, Biwater, ICI-Polyester, National Grid.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what use his Department had its agencies makes of postcode areas for the collection of data; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14984]

Mr. Streeter: Neither the Department nor its agencies uses postcode areas directly for the collection of data. The Land Registry records postcodes as part of property descriptions and in the addresses of registered proprietors; postcodes can be used to search for individual title numbers. In some other data collections conducted by the Department and its agencies addresses with postcodes are sought—for example, on some court forms. Postcodes are also generally used in addresses when sending requests for data by post.

Public Record Office

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the quinquennial agency review of the Public Record Office. [15601]

Mr. Streeter: The second stage of the agency review—the prior options review—will begin on 12 February and will be completed by 30 September 1997.

The Lord Chancellor has appointed a steering group to oversee the prior options review, comprising officials from his Department, the Public Record Office and the Office of Public Service, and representatives from his Advisory Council on Public Records and from the business community. The review will be led by the Public Record Office in liaison with his Department.

It will follow Cabinet Office guidelines and will include an update of the evaluation of the Public Record Office's performance as an executive agency.

Comments and contributions from those with an interest in the Public Record Office and its work would be welcome and should be sent by 5 April 1997 to Elizabeth Honer, Secretary to the Public Record Office Agency Review Steering Group, Public Record Office, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Attorney-General what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14985]

The Attorney-General: My Departments and agencies make no such use of postcode areas.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sports Council (Grant Aid)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* the organisations and *(b)* the individuals which the Sports Council has consulted during its current review of sports to be eligible for grant aid. [13525]

Mr. Sproat: There is no current review of sports eligible for grant aid. Work was undertaken in 1995–96 to co-ordinate the activities provided by the Sports Council's regions and units which assist in the development of excellence.

The English Sports Council will be providing a high-quality range of services, including specialist advice, to all recognised governing bodies of sport. At the same time, the council is to give an enhanced set of additional services to a core group of 23 priority sports, dependant on specific needs.

Governing bodies and organisations recognised by the Sports Council have been consulted on the review of services provided and all were invited to a briefing day meeting held on 8 May 1996. The other home country sports councils have also been consulted.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many sports have benefited from grant aid from the Sports Council; and if she will list them together with the amount of money they have received since 1994. [13519]

Mr. Sproat: In the financial year 1994–95, a total of 62 sports received grant aid from the Sports Council amounting to £10,005,034; in 1995–96 a total of 65 sports received grant aid from the Sports Council, amounting to £10,956,247; and in 1996–97 65 sports will receive grant aid planned at £9,899,957. Assistance has also been provided to sport and physical activities through the national sports centres and regional sports development schemes. Full details are provided in the table.

Sport	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Angling	54,125	81,750	72,500
Archery	55,000	109,000	80,000
Association football	0	11,250	45,000
Athletics	332,500	410,000	326,500
Badminton	320,000	365,000	332,000
Baseball	32,500	43,000	43,000
Basketball	364,000	355,000	272,250
Bobsleigh	100,000	100,000	100,000
Bowls	42,250	41,250	22,000
Boxing	80,875	153,125	128,500
Canoeing	320,000	380,000	320,000
Caving	30,500	29,125	23,750
Cricket	238,334	172,500	220,450
Croquet	28,500	29,500	27,250
Curling	0	28,000	32,000
Cycling	311,750	548,625	513,250
Disabled sport	566,500	803,250	625,500
Equestrian	145,000	178,000	165,000
Fencing	175,000	175,000	175,000
Fitness/aerobics	0	45,000	75,000
Flying	10,000	2,500	0
Gliding	42,500	37,500	28,500

Sport	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Golf	25,000	25,000	35,000
Gymnastics	416,500	462,500	429,500
Handball	11,000	16,000	16,000
Hang and paragliding	70,000	70,000	70,000
Hockey	553,250	792,750	581,000
Ice hockey	30,000	30,000	30,000
Ice skating	110,000	122,000	120,000
Judo	375,000	490,000	375,000
Karate	106,000	70,000	67,500
Lacrosse	130,000	111,250	145,834
Land yachting	17,500	0	0
Life saving	38,000	26,250	30,000
Model flying	15,000	15,000	15,000
Modern pentathlon	82,000	89,000	70,000
Motor cycling	0	0	10,125
Mountaineering	175,000	195,000	216,250
Movement and dance	185,875	154,175	133,125
Netball	117,125	212,500	128,750
Orienteering	125,000	132,000	124,750
Parachuting	93,500	93,500	93,500
Petanque	28,750	17,500	21,000
Rambling	45,000	20,000	0
Real tennis	0	11,250	17,500
Roller hockey	18,000	18,000	18,000
Roller skating	18,000	30,000	28,000
Rounders	12,250	13,250	14,250
Rowing	442,500	520,000	447,500
Rugby league	167,500	182,500	167,500
Rugby union	90,000	113,750	125,000
Sailing	496,750	518,250	460,750
Sand and land yachting	0	20,300	19,000
Shooting	568,175	251,785	340,215
Skiing	427,000	276,500	225,000
Softball	0	0	15,000
Squash	221,250	226,250	240,000
Surfing	26,000	21,000	25,000
Surf life saving	40,625	33,125	38,250
Swimming	383,900	345,500	321.500
Table tennis	316,500	297,250	317,500
Tennis and rackets	11,250	0	0
Tenpin bowling	15,500	20,000	30,000
Triathlon	35,000	40,000	40,000
Tug of war	7,500	7,500	9,375
Volleyball	275,000	355,000	275,000
Water skiing	197,250	195,000	195,000
Weight lifting	177,500	159,320	145,000
Wrestling	56,750	57,917	45,833
Total	10,005,034	10,956,247	9,899,957

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many sports are currently eligible to receive grant aid from the Sports Council; and if she will list them. [13517]

Mr. Sproat: Ninety-five sports are currently eligible to be considered for the purposes of receiving grant aid. They are:

Aikido
American football
Angling
Archery
Association football
Athletics
Badminton
Ballooning
Baseball
Basketball
Billiards and snooker
Bobsleigh
Bowls
Boxing
Camogie
Canoeing
Caving
Chinese martial arts
Cricket
Croquet
Curling
Cycling
Disability sport
Dragon boat race
Equestrian
Fencing
Fives
Flying
Gaelic football
Gliding
Golf
Gymnastics
Handball
Hang/para gliding
Highland games
Hockey
Horse racing
Hovering
Hurling
Ice hockey
Ice skating
Judi
Ju jitsu
Karate
Kendo
Korfball
Lacrosse
Lawn tennis
Life saving
Luge
Modern pentathlon
Motor cycling
Motor sports
Mountaineering
Movement and dance
Netball
Orienteering
Parachuting
Petanque
Polo
Pool
Quoits
Racketball
Rambling
Real tennis and rackets
Roller hockey
Roller skating
Rounders
Rowing
Rugby league
Rugby union
Sailing/yachting
Sand and land yachting
Shinty
Shooting
Skiing
Softball
Sombo wrestling
Squash
Sub aqua
Surfing
Surf life saving
Swimming
Table tennis
Taekwondo
Tang soo do
Tenpin bowling
Trampolining
Triathlon
Tug of war

Volleyball
Water skiing
Weightlifting
Wrestling
Yoga

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects the Sports Council's review of which sports are to be eligible for grant aid to be completed; and when she expects the revised guide lines to be published. [13524]

Mr. Sproat: The English Sports Council is not undertaking such a review.

TV Licences

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the extra revenue which the BBC will receive as a result of its decision to implement the legal advice that a TV licence cannot cover more than one property. [15419]

Mr. Sproat: The BBC announced on 29 March 1996 that, in the light of legal advice, it could not continue the long-standing previous practice whereby the use of TV in second homes was deemed to be covered by a licence for the main residence, provided that there was no simultaneous use at both places. At that time, the Licensing Authority had some 38,000 second homes registered as not needing a second licence under that—incorrect—interpretation of the licensing legislation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly lay new, consolidated licence fee regulations, which will bring next year's licence fees into force from 1 April. These regulations will also amend the licensing requirements so that a licence for a main residence covers use of TV by members of the household in any vehicle, vessel or touring caravan and, provided there is no simultaneous use, by any member of the household in any static caravan or mobile home. Use of TV in permanent structure second homes will continue to require a separate licence.

If TV continues to be used at all the 38,000 second homes previously registered with the Licensing Authority as not requiring a separate licence, this should raise over £3 million extra licence fee revenue for the BBC each year. If colour licences were needed, and paid for, in all the fixed second homes in the United Kingdom—an estimated total of some 200,000—the maximum extra revenue accruing would be around £18 million, though some of these homes may already by licensed.

Sports Council Lottery Fund

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many sports are currently eligible to assistance from the Sports Council lottery fund; and if she will list them. [13523]

Mr. Sproat: One hundred and eleven sports are currently eligible to assistance from the English Sports Council lottery sports fund. They are:

Aikido
American football
Angling
Archery
Arm wrestling
Association football
Athletics
Australian rules football
Badminton
Ballooning
Baseball
Basketball
Baton twirling
Bicycle polo
Billiards and snooker
Bobsleigh
Boccia
Bowls
Boxing
Camogie
Canoeing
Caving
Chinese martial arts
Cricket
Croquet
Crossbow
Curling
Cycling
Disability sport
Dragon boat racing
Equestrian
Fencing
Fives
Flying
Gaelic football
Gliding
Golf
Gymnastics
Handball
Hang-gliding and paragliding
Highland games
Hockey
Horse racing
Hovering
Hurling
Ice hockey
Ice skating
Jet skiing
Ju jitsu
Judo
Kabaddi
Karate
Kendo
Korfball
Lacrosse
Lawn tennis
Life saving
Luge
Modern pentathlon
Motor cycling
Motor sports
Mountaineering
Movement, dance, exercise and fitness
Netball
Orienteering
Parachuting
Petanque
Polo
Pony trekking
Pool
Quoits
Racketball
Rackets
Raquetball
Rambling
Real tennis
Roller hockey
Roller skating
Rounders
Rowing
Rugby league
Rugby union
Sailing/yachting

Sand/land yachting
Shinty
Shooting
Skateboarding
Skiing
Skipping
Snowboarding
Softball
Sombo wrestling
Squash
Street/skater hockey
Sub-aqua
Surf-life saving
Surfing
Swimming
Table tennis
Taekwondo
Tank soo do
Tenpin bowling
Trampolining
Triathlon
Tug of war
Unihoc
Volleyball
Water skiing
Weightlifting
Wrestling
Yoga

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if she will list *(a)* the bodies and *(b)* the individuals which the Sports Council lottery fund has consulted during the current review of which sports are eligible for lottery awards; [13521]

(2) when she expects the Sports Council lottery fund's review of what sports are eligible for lottery awards to be completed; and when she expects the revised guidelines to be published. [13520]

Mr. Sproat: The English Sports Council lottery unit is not currently conducting a review of those sports eligible for lottery funding.

Non-print Publications (Legal Deposit)

Sir Alan Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how she plans to take forward the proposals for extension of legal deposit to electronic and other non-profit publications from the British Library, the other legal deposit libraries and the British Film Institute in January 1996; and if she will make a statement.[15563]

Mr. Sproat: The Government have today published a consultation paper which seeks views on the present arrangements for legal deposit of printed publications with the British Library and the other legal deposit libraries; invites comments on the availability and use of legal deposit material in Northern Ireland; and seeks views on a range of voluntary and statutory options for deposit of electronic publications, sound recordings, films and video recordings, and microform publications. The paper also seeks views on establishing a mechanism for further extension of legal deposit without the need for fresh primary legislation.

The main purpose of legal deposit is to establish as comprehensive an archive as possible of our national published output for use by future generations. As publication technology, and non-print forms of publication, develop the Government regard it as essential that some way is found to ensure that published material in forms other than print is deposited in our national archives. The consultation paper addresses the scope for building on existing voluntary arrangements and extending statutory deposit. Legal deposit imposes a burden on publishers, and it is essential that we consult fully on the issues with the publishing and film industries, as well as with libraries, their users and others with an interest. The consultation paper addresses the circumstances in which published material can be accessed and preserved without infringing publishers' intellectual property rights or damaging their business interests. It also includes a draft assessment of the additional costs which publishers, film producers and film distributors might incur in complying with an extended system of legal deposit.

I have today placed a copy of the consultation paper in the Libraries of the House, and the Government are arranging for copies to be sent to a wide range of bodies and individuals with an interest in legal deposit. Further copies are available, on request, from my Department. The consultation paper seeks responses by 11 April. Anybody wishing to comment on the issues raised in the consultation paper, including the additional burden which extended legal deposit would place on business, should write by that date to my Department. In the light of the responses which we receive, the Government will consider whether to introduce legislation on legal deposit.

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is her Department's estimate of the percentage breakdown of transport use by visitors to the Greenwich millennium exhibition. [10867]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Library of the House.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many people are employed by her Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14464]

Mr. Sproat: Advice on equal opportunities is an integral part of the personnel function and is not separately costed.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what use her Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14805]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage uses postcodes to collate information on national lottery awards and last reviewed their usage in November 1996.

Sporting Events (Public Highways)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the Sports Council's policy towards sporting events held on public highways. [13925]

Mr. Sproat: I understand the English Sports Council encourages sports bodies to stage sporting events at the most appropriate venue. Where events are held on the public highway, the council wishes to see that the safety of competitors is ensured by careful planning and organisation.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what meetings she has held with the Home Secretary regarding the policy of the Association of Chief Police Officers towards sports events held on public highways. [13924]

Mr. Sproat: None. I understand the policy of the Association of Chief Police Officers has been, for a number of years, to encourage organisations to hold events away from the highway in local parks or sports stadiums. This stems from their concerns about the safety of participants, and the danger to other road users. There are certain events which are treated as exceptions to the policy, the most notable example being the London marathon, where the police and the highway authorities are content that the event cannot be held off the road.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Jobmatch

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her latest estimate of *(a)* the total number of people who have received jobmatch payments, *(b)* the total number applying, *(c)* the number refused, by reason of refusal, *(d)* the total cost of the scheme and *(e)* the annual cost of extending the pilot scheme to all age groups nationally. [15089]

Mr. Forth: The information available is as follows: *(a)* over 6,000 people have joined the jobmatch programme since April 1995, *(b)* we do not keep records of the numbers applying for jobmatch, or *(c)* the number of people refused, but the only circumstances in which this would happen would be where either the person was not eligible or the job was not a qualifying one, *(d)* the estimated cost of the jobmatch pilots which end in March 1997 is £8 million and, *(e)* the cost of extending jobmatch to all age groups nationally would be about £50 million per year.

Special Needs Teaching Training

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding the continued training of teachers with special reference to the teaching of children with special needs; and if she will make a statement. [15094]

Mr. Forth: In March 1996, the Secretary of State was presented with the report, "Professional Development to meet Special Educational Needs" by the special educational needs training consortium. In response, she asked the Teacher Training Agency to take forward a range of measures to improve the training of teachers of all children with special educational needs.

We are very pleased with the TTA's progress and with the priority that it is giving to training in special educational needs within its overall framework for teacher training. I understand that the TTA will be reporting to the Secretary of State on its work later this year.

Severe Hardship Payments Scheme

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of *(a)* introducing regulations relating to the severe hardship payments scheme for 16 and 17-year-olds, *(b)* administering the scheme through (i) Benefits Agency local offices and (ii) jobcentres and *(c)* introducing a right of appeal in respect of the scheme. [15079]

Mr. Forth: The jobseeker's allowance—JSA—replaced income support for jobseekers on October 7 1996. Under JSA, 16 and 17-year-olds attend the careers service and jobcentre. They no longer have to attend the Benefits Agency office.

We are carrying out a full evaluation of JSA. There will be a range of surveys, including qualitative research on the effect of JSA on 16 to 17-year-olds, covering both young people who would otherwise be in severe hardship and those in prescribed circumstances. Also included will be surveys of Employment Service and Benefits Agency staff involved in the delivery of JSA.

JSA continues the policy whereby unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds who would otherwise be in severe hardship may be awarded benefit at the Secretary of State's discretion. There are no plans to change this.

Income Support (Young People)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her estimate of *(a)* the number gaining and *(b)* the cost of extending the period during which income support is payable to a young person who has left local authority accommodation provided under part III of the Children Act 1989 to (i) 13 weeks, (ii) 26 weeks and (iii) the relevant child benefit extension period. [15077]

Mr. Forth: The jobseeker's allowance—JSA—replaced income support for jobseekers on 7 October 1996. We do not have information on the number of young people—16 and 17-year-olds—who claim JSA immediately after leaving local authority care. These people may be entitled to JSA for up to eight weeks. When this period finishes, a young person may apply for JSA on the ground that he would otherwise be in severe hardship. If the claim is successful, the Secretary of State will direct that JSA should be paid for a specific period—usually eight weeks. This direction may be renewed at the Secretary of State's discretion. At all times the young person will have to meet the entitlement conditions for JSA.

Loudwater Combined School

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to make a decision on the proposals by Loudwater combined school to establish a new nursery. [14981]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* Officials have today informed the chairman of governors of Loudwater combined school that the Secretary of State has approved the governors' proposal to establish a nursery.

Seat Belts (School Transport)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the cost for each local education authority area of installing seat belts in vehicles used for transporting children; and if she will make a statement. [15337]

Mrs. Gillan: The costs to authorities of implementing the new requirements were taken into account by the Government when determining the total allowed for education in the local government finance settlement.

It is for each local authority to determine its own level of education expenditure, both in aggregate and on the different areas of its education service, including transport, on the basis of its assessment of local needs and priorities and within its capping limits.

Teachers (Average Age)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the average age of teachers employed *(a)* in London and *(b)* in the south-west region in the most recent year for which figures are available. [15423]

Mr. Forth: The average age of teachers employed in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector, as at 31 March 1995, was 40 years in Greater London and 42 years in the south-west region.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost for each local education authority of early retirement and redundancy packages for teachers for each of the last five years for which figures are available. [15355]

Mrs. Gillan: Total expenditure on premature retirement compensation and Crombie payments as recorded by each local education authority in England and Wales for the years 1990–91 to 1994–95 is shown in the following table. The expenditure figures include payments made to further and higher education lecturers and to teachers at sixth-form colleges and grant-maintained schools who were granted premature retirement by the LEA. Separate details of redundancy payments are not collected centrally.

PRC and Crombie payments

England and Wales *£000*

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Corporation of London	0	0	0	3	3
Camden	0	0	0	0	0
Greenwich	0	0	0	0	0
Hackney	0	0	0	0	0
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	0	0	0	0
Islington	0	0	0	0	0
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0	101	139	161
Lambeth	0	0	134	0	44
Lewisham	0	0	0	449	230
Southwark	0	0	0	0	0
Tower Hamlets	0	0	403	0	847
Wandsworth	0	0	0	0	359
Westminster	0	0	0	0	0
Barking and Dagenham	605	290	751	601	635
Barnet	1,344	1,425	1,475	1,579	1,731
Bexley	0	0	0	0	0
Brent	0	0	0	0	0
Bromley	981	586	551	557	509
Croydon	248	630	474	443	405
Ealing	861	479	636	1,077	619
Enfield	0	0	705	0	0
Haringey	474	541	583	612	551
Harrow	353	534	397	466	635
Havering	0	0	0	0	0
Hillingdon	0	1	0	0	0
Hounslow	11	208	253	349	405
Kingston upon Thames	304	358	454	428	477
Merton	0	0	0	0	0
Newham	769	269	364	440	489
Redbridge	288	387	405	416	585
Richmond upon Thames	0	0	0	0	0
Sutton	0	0	0	0	212
Waltham Forest	324	5	13	374	0
Birmingham	3,422	3,947	5,443	4,911	4,557
Coventry	12	2,982	2,137	450	2,201
Dudley	884	851	791	995	1,137
Sandwell	0	0	0	0	0
Solihull	0	0	553	575	507
Walsall	0	643	1,567	676	1,945
Wolverhampton	94	195	326	73	165
Knowsley	0	957	945	1,132	1,157
Liverpool	2,727	3,780	3,058	2,684	2,826

PRC and Crombie payments

England and Wales *£000*

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
St. Helens	953	1,126	2,061	1,383	1,391
Sefton	1,496	1,536	0	0	0
Wirral	231	182	97	28	29
Bolton	898	1,022	1,122	1,098	1,210
Bury	848	1,031	1,064	1,016	1,029
Manchester	2,144	2,815	4,400	4,559	3,808
Oldham	0	0	0	0	0
Rochdale	469	493	806	768	836
Salford	0	0	0	0	0
Stockport	512	447	547	677	706
Tameside	0	0	933	853	948
Trafford	0	0	0	569	615
Wigan	1,377	1,681	1,999	2,269	2,423
Barnsley	200	532	35	37	43
Doncaster	0	379	0	1,583	1,738
Rotherham	203	271	0	0	0
Sheffield	40	0	0	0	0
Bradford	1,354	1,153	2,860	2,863	2,572
Calderdale	453	0	0	0	0
Kirklees	275	1,465	838	397	410
Leeds	0	0	3	3,128	0
Wakefield	1,228	1,389	1,924	1,823	1,604
Gateshead	0	44	73	848	846
Newcastle upon Tyne	305	1,261	1,608	2,776	1,930
North Tyneside	0	0	0	0	0
South Tyneside	0	0	0	273	287
Sunderland	364	470	397	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0
Avon	0	0	747	1,347	1,321
Bedfordshire	0	0	0	0	0
Berkshire	704	812	779	890	1,130
Buckinghamshire	249	265	1,105	1,454	1,520
Cambridgeshire	899	1,447	1,705	1,736	1,785
Cheshire	191	124	1,874	940	814
Cleveland	1,328	1,720	1,761	1,901	1,868
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	1,793
Cumbria	0	0	0	0	0
Derbyshire	1,320	1,556	696	2,425	3,024
Devon	0	0	0	0	0
Dorset	782	1,183	1,443	1,402	1,407
Durham	−14	0	0	0	0
East Sussex	547	877	1,039	2,044	1,968
Essex	1,915	1,945	2,066	2,662	2,459
Gloucestershire	1,567	2,150	0	0	0
Hampshire	1,862	2,215	2,750	2,720	3,143
Hereford and Worcester	0	264	0	347	−54
Hertfordshire	453	1,734	1,769	1,322	1,260
Humberside	726	759	854	0	3,615
Isle of Wight	94	108	124	134	174
Kent	314	151	223	219	227
Lancashire	4,374	4,804	5,193	4,781	3,539
Leicestershire	1,267	2,075	2,275	1,701	2,380
Lincolnshire	968	148	126	110	78
Norfolk	1,200	196	0	0	4
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	0	0
Northamptonshire	111	128	494	313	334
Northumberland	0	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire	1,066	2,295	0	0	0
Oxfordshire	1,389	1,585	1,586	1,694	1,872
Shropshire	16	19	18	13	5
Somerset	0	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire	2,715	3,214	3,987	3,814	3,797
Suffolk	14	156	0	1,112	1,254
Surrey	0	0	2,791	4,040	3,259
Warwickshire	922	1,269	1,428	1,395	1,490
West Sussex	0	0	0	0	728
Wiltshire	0	0	872	0	1,342
Clwyd	1,938	2,134	2,674	2,364	2,657
Dyfed	812	784	1,006	863	937
Gwent	121	2,866	2,606	2,704	3,174
Gwynedd	206	154	151	140	137

PRC and Crombie payments

England and Wales *£000*

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Mid Glamorgan	0	919	2,005	343	387
Powys	300	306	644	541	429
South Glamorgan	0	949	972	965	999
West Glamorgan	1,470	1,349	798	1,819	1,922
Total (England and Wales)	58,877	79,025	91,847	96,632	103,995

TREASURY

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *35*, if he will list the principal differences between the Cardiff bay barrage scheme as presented for approval in November 1987 and as approved in June 1988. [13492]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The answer can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *35*, concerning the Cardiff bay barrage, if he will list the consultant's reports supplied to his Department by the Welsh Office between November 1987 and June 1988 in support of the main economic appraisal document. [13493]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* In November 1987, the Welsh Office provided the Treasury with a copy of an economic appraisal of the project prepared by Peat Marwick McLintock. Peat Marwick McLintock subsequently revised the appraisal and this was provided to the Treasury in June 1988.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *35*, if he will place in the Library *(a)* the Treasury's letter of approval for the Cardiff Bay barrage project and *(b)* the appraisal commentary by his departmental economic appraisal team. [13491]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Approval was provided in a ministerial exchange of letters. It is not the Government's practice to place such correspondence, or advice provided to Ministers by officials, in the Library.

Administration Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *398*, on gross running costs, if he will make a statement on how the additional expenditure in each of those Departments incurring an increase is to be used. [14582]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The effectiveness of Government policy in bearing down on the costs of departmental administration has allowed increases in certain Departments' running costs to reflect key Government priorities.

Additional running costs provision for the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the Department for Social Security reflects additional anti-fraud and anti-evasion measures. Further details of this "spend to save" package can be found on page 106 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98". Extra provision for the Home Office reflects the projected growth in the prison population. Additional running costs provision for the agriculture departments is to fund the continuing package of measures to counter BSE.

The detailed allocation of running costs provision within Departments is a matter for individual spending Ministers.

Share Option Schemes

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the cost to the Exchequer in 1995–96, *(b)* the estimated likely costs in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98 of approved discretionary share option schemes and *(c)* the estimated costs of company share option plans in 1998–99. [15101]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* Available provisional estimates are as follows:

Estimated cost of tax relief[1]

£ million

Approved discretionary share option schemes[2]	
1995–96	70
1996–97	80

Information on share schemes comes from annual returns which must be submitted by companies operating schemes. The latest year for which forms have been received and processed is 1994–95. The estimated cost of tax relief for executive share option schemes for 1994–95 is £60 million. This cost has been projected forward using, changes in the general level of share prices, and assumes a similar level of options exercised.

[1] Estimated costs are the effects on tax liabilities for each year, and not the receipts in each year. Figures are tentative and subject to a wide margin of error.

[2] The costs take account that relief from income tax is partially offset by liability to capital gains tax arising from disposals of shares acquired under the scheme.

Figures for further years are not available, however it is estimated that the first full-year cost of tax relief for company share option plans may eventually be around £90 million.

London Transport Funding

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he received from *(a)* chief officers and the Board of London Transport and *(b)* the City of London about the Government's annual settlement for London Transport; and what was contained in the representations about the effect of the settlement upon London Transport's investment programme and existing infrastructure. [13762]

Mr. Waldegrave: A number of representations have been received about the annual settlement for London Transport. In addition to investment in the Jubilee line extension, the settlement provides for average investment of £525 million per year, 50 per cent. higher in real terms than the average of the 1980s.

European Community Finance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the main items of income and expenditure of the general budget of the European Economic Community for each year since 1973 at 1996 prices, together with the percentages of each main category of income or expenditure, indicating also accessions to the Community in relevant years. [14330]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is set out in the tables.

Table 1: European Community Budget: Expenditure

Figures are in millions of ecu at constant 1996 prices

	EAGGF guarantee	Per cent. of total general budget	EAGGF guidance	Per cent. of total general budget	ERDF	Per cent. of total general budget	ESF	Per cent of total general budget	Cohesion fund	Per cent. of total general budget	Research	Per cent. of total general budget	Admin.	Per cent. of total general budget	Other	Per cent. of total general budget	Total
UK, Ireland and Denmark accede																	
1973	18,962	80.2	57	0.2	—	—	1,303	5.5	—	—	368	1.6	1,287	5.4	1,659	7.0	23,635
1974	16,048	71.7	175	0.8	—	—	1,132	5.1	—	—	512	2.3	1,420	6.3	3,100	13.8	22,387
1975	17,547	74.4	311	1.3	608	2.6	603	2.6	—	—	470	2.0	1,476	6.3	2,571	10.9	23,585
1976	20,442	74.5	407	1.5	1,088	4.0	768	2.8	—	—	461	1.7	1,562	5.7	2,700	9.8	27,428
1977	21,387	75.4	367	1.3	1,299	4.6	560	2.0	—	—	587	2.1	1,629	5.7	2,535	8.9	28,364
1978	25,548	72.1	958	2.7	1,545	4.4	1,584	4.5	—	—	786	2.2	2,021	5.7	3,003	8.5	35,446
1979	27,670	73.0	763	2.0	1,862	4.9	1,412	3.7	—	—	713	1.9	2,066	5.5	3,396	9.0	37,883
1980	26,762	71.2	746	2.0	1,880	5.0	1,660	4.4	—	—	863	2.3	1,967	5.2	3,704	9.9	37,582
Greece accedes																	
1981	23,644	64.6	1,154	3.2	5,143	14.1	1,326	3.6	—	—	666	1.8	2,013	5.5	3,937	10.8	37,882
1982	23,732	59.9	1,260	3.2	5,624	14.2	1,963	5.0	—	—	847	2.1	2,029	5.1	4,170	10.5	39,624
1983	28,164	64.4	1,026	2.3	4,115	9.4	2,140	4.9	—	—	2,401	5.5	1,977	4.5	3,899	8.9	43,721
1984	30,593	67.7	994	2.2	2,357	5.2	2,023	4.5	—	—	2,770	6.1	2,024	4.5	4,436	9.8	45,198
1985	31,090	70.8	1,080	2.5	2,537	5.8	2,218	5.1	—	—	1,068	2.4	2,056	4.7	3,867	8.8	43,918
Spain and Portugal accede																	
1986	33,009	63.8	1,151	2.2	3,666	7.1	3,637	7.0	—	—	1,157	2.2	2,289	4.4	6,840	13.2	51,749
1987	32,902	65.4	1,132	2.3	3,670	7.3	3,598	7.2	—	—	1,383	2.7	2,433	4.8	5,185	10.3	50,303
1988	37,949	67.4	1,567	2.8	4,092	7.3	3,156	5.6	—	—	1,551	2.8	2,631	4.7	5,386	9.6	56,331
1989	33,799	63.4	1,764	3.3	5,127	9.6	3,500	6.6	—	—	1,985	3.7	2,708	5.1	4,420	8.3	53,302
1990	33,619	61.5	2,265	4.1	5,651	10.3	3,985	7.3	—	—	2,221	4.1	2,920	5.3	4,012	7.3	54,673
1991	36,413	57.7	2,453	3.9	7,418	11.8	4,740	7.5	—	—	2,007	3.2	3,124	5.0	6,944	11.0	63,099
1992	35,143	53.9	3,205	4.9	9,627	14.8	4,844	7.4	—	—	2,142	3.3	3,097	4.7	7,160	11.0	65,217
1993	37,637	54.0	3,163	4.5	10,360	14.9	5,842	8.4	863	1.2	2,432	3.5	3,243	4.7	6,142	8.8	69,682
1994	34,775	55.9	2,617	4.2	6,691	10.7	4,560	7.3	900	1.4	2,613	4.2	3,406	5.5	6,681	10.7	62,243
Austria, Sweden and Finland accede																	
1995	35,347	52.0	2,596	3.8	8,591	12.6	4,665	6.9	1,743	2.6	2,611	3.8	3,653	5.4	8,794	12.9	68,001

Table 2: European Community Budget: Revenue

Figures are in millions of ecu at constant 1996 prices

	Agricultural levies	Per cent. of total revenue	Customs duties	Per cent. of total revenue	VAT source	Per cent. of total revenue	GNP/4th resource	Per cent. of total revenue	Misc.	Per cent. of total revenue	Total
UK, Ireland and Denmark accede											
1973	2,677	10.4	10,420	40.4					12,684	49.2	25,781
1974	1,531	6.4	12,698	53.2					9,628	40.4	23,858
1975	2,393	9.2	12,776	49.3					10,720	41.4	25,889
1976	4,220	14.2	14,741	49.7					10,722	36.1	29,683
1977	5,774	20.5	12,751	45.3					9,641	34.2	28,166
1978	6,708	18.3	12,925	35.3					17,023	46.4	36,656
1979	5,710	14.4	13,823	34.8	12,621	31.8			7,515	18.9	39,669
1980	4,745	12.2	13,997	35.9	17,203	44.2			3,000	7.7	38,945
Greece accedes											
1981	3,734	9.2	13,661	33.8	19,635	48.6			3,399	8.4	40,429
1982	4,312	10.1	13,193	30.9	23,230	54.3			2,010	4.7	42,746
1983	4,342	9.5	12,907	28.1	24,426	53.2			4,228	9.2	45,904
1984	4,923	11.3	12,723	29.2	24,310	55.8			1,574	3.6	43,530
1985	3,434	7.8	13,096	29.6	23,985	54.2			3,746	8.5	44,261
Spain and Portugal accede											
1986	3,413	6.8	12,197	24.3	33,166	66.0			1,468	2.9	50,245
1987	4,441	8.7	12,812	25.0	33,638	65.6			409	0.8	51,300

Table 2: European Community Budget: Revenue

Figures are in millions of ecu at constant 1996 prices

	Agricultural levies	*Per cent. of total revenue*	*Customs duties*	*Per cent. of total revenue*	*VAT source*	*Per cent. of total revenue*	*GNP/4th resource*	*Per cent. of total revenue*	*Misc.*	*Per cent. of total revenue*	*Total*
1988	3,578	6.2	12,785	22.3	32,857	57.2	6,105	10.6	2,134	3.7	57,459
1989	3,136	5.2	13,487	22.5	34,387	57.3	5,910	9.8	3,108	5.2	60,028
1990	2,327	4.0	12,762	22.1	34,048	59.1	118	0.2	8,404	14.6	57,659
1991	2,924	4.4	13,497	20.4	35,600	53.8	8,756	13.2	5,378	8.1	66,156
1992	2,237	3.3	12,709	18.9	39,008	58.0	9,366	13.9	3,883	5.8	67,204
1993	2,095	2.9	11,999	16.8	37.432	52.5	17,927	25.2	1,823	2.6	71,276
1994	2,192	3.1	11,813	16.9	35,143	50.4	18,686	26.8	1,916	2.7	69,750
Austria, Sweden and Finland accede											
1995	1,995	2.6	12,834	16.7	40,202	52.2	14,560	18.9	7,438	9.7	77,029

Notes:

1. Figures are for outturn. As yet outturn figures are not available for 1996.
2. Figures converted to constant 1996 prices using EU15 deflator throughout.
3. Items are denominated in ecus as the unit of account for the EC Budget.
4. Other spending includes spending on external policies, internal policies other than research and Financial Instruments for Fisheries Guidance.

Sources:

1. The Community Budget: The Facts in Figures, 1996 Edition; European Commission.
2. European Economy, Number 62, 1996; European Commission.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Kenya

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department has provided to Kenya in promoting family planning; what has been the birth rate for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [15379]

Dr. Liam Fox: The crude birth rate in 1989 was 47 per thousand population. By 1994 it is estimated that the rate had declined to 42 per thousand population. Details of British development assistance for family planning are given in the table.

Year	*Project*	*Description*	*Total cost £ million*
1988–94	Population III	Clinic development, training programmes, NGO support	4.6
1993–94	Emergency supply of contraceptives	50 million condoms and 200,000 vaginal foaming tablets	1.02
1994	Family planning services	Injectable contraceptives, disposable gloves, family planning clinical equipment sets, intra-uterine copper device insertion kits	2.0
1995–96	Family planning bridging project	1 million doses injectable contraception (DepoProvera) and up to 30 million condoms	1.45
1996–97	Contraceptive supply	1.1 million doses injectable contraception (DepoProvera) and up to 40 million condoms	1.94
1996–97	Family planning interim support project	To supply 2.45 million doses DepoProvera and 5 million condoms plus support to eight NGOs.	3.5

We have recently committed an additional £11 million for strengthening reproductive health services in Kenya, for expenditure over the next five years.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Fairs and Seminar Support

Mr. Garnier: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the outstanding bids for trade fair and overseas seminar support in 1997–98. [15598]

Mr. Nelson: I am pleased to announce today that my Department will offer grants for the remaining 40 trade fairs not included in my statement on 17 January. The full programme for 1997–98 will thus comprise support for groups exhibiting at 300 trade fairs and 31 seminars abroad. I am putting a list of the further events into the Library of the House and my Department will be writing individually to all those who made bids to tell them the outcome.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14800]

Mr. Greg Knight: Postcodes are used to define the area covered by a survey of electricity and gas prices paid by industrial users in four United Kingdom cities in order to meet the requirements of an EU directive 9013771EEC. They are also used to fix the location of businesses within local authority areas and travel-to-work areas which determine eligibility for grants and awards. The Department does not otherwise use postcode areas in the collection of data and in distributing grants and awards.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Burden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the working time directive applies to *(a)* all public sector employees and *(b)* employees of the privatised utilities. [15171]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* The directive applies to all sectors of activity, both public and private, with certain exceptions. These exceptions cover: air; rail; road; sea; inland waterway and lake transport; sea fishing; other work at sea; the activities of doctors in training; and cases where characteristics peculiar to certain specific activities of the armed forces, police or civil protection services inevitably conflict with the directive.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the role of the ECGD in respect of the funding of a power station in Palau in 1983. [15207]

Mr. Nelson: Records show that in 1983 the ECGD guaranteed an export credit loan to assist in the financing of a contract for the supply of a 15MW diesel generator power station to Palau. Following a default in 1985, the ECGD instructed the lending bank to exercise its security rights. This was successfully achieved and, as a result, the ECGD's guarantee terminated and the relevant files were closed.

Trade Mission (Azerbaijan)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the trade mission led by Lord Fraser to Azerbaijan. [13712]

Mr. Nelson: Lord Fraser's mission comprised a group of British companies focused on the inspection, repair and maintenance sector for the oil and gas industry. Its objective was to assess the business opportunities available in the refurbishment of the badly run-down Azeri oil and gas production facilities. A number of significant opportunities were identified and discussed with senior authorities and several of the participating companies are to return over the coming weeks for detailed follow-up. During the course of the visit a substantial contract award was made to one of the companies on the mission.

The mission was regarded as very successful by those participating.

Nanotechnology

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many EU funded networks in nanotechnology are based *(a)* inside and *(b)* outside the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [14969]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* The European Commission's research and development information service database—CORDIS—indicates that there are at least 33 current (1997) nanotechnology projects, established with EU funding under the EC research and development framework programme. Of these 33 project consortia, three are networks. Organisations from the United Kingdom lead four of the projects and participate in 16. The data provided cover the areas of micro-submicro electronics and systems, nano-structures, nano-processing and high precision engineering.

In addition, a UK lead consortium, with partners in Germany, France, the Netherlands and Denmark is currently preparing a proposal for a nano-engineering network in response to already existing—and equivalent—networks in Japan and the US.

Business Appointment Rules

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications have been made by his Department's officials under the business appointment rules in each year since 1989; and how many of these applications have been granted. [9779]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 13 January 1997]:* My Department, including those parts of the DTI that were transferred to the Department as a result of machinery of government changes, received the following applications:

1989: 140

1990: 160

1991: 46

1992: 73

1993: 51

1994: 82

1995: 73

1996: 142.

No applications were refused, although several were approved with various conditions and waiting periods attached.

Animals (Cosmetics Testing)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the proposed EU ban on the use of animals in cosmetic testing. [14779]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Commission has announced that it will be bringing forward proposals for a draft Council directive to ban the testing of finished cosmetic products on animals from 1 January 1998, but with certain dispensations for exceptional cases. United Kingdom toxicological advisers see no justification for dispensations and we intend therefore to press, in the negotiations, for a total ban on finished product testing.

Electricity and Gas Prices

Dr. Hampson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what extent the prices for electricity and gas have fallen for industrial users since the privatisation of these industries; and how average prices compare with those in other EU countries. [14595]

Mr. Page: Between privatisation in quarter four 1986 and quarter three 1996, average UK industrial gas prices have fallen by 59 per cent. in real terms, whilst between privatisation in quarter two 1990 and quarter three 1996, average UK industrial electricity prices have fallen by 15 per cent. in real terms.

In 1995, the latest year for which comprehensive data are available, UK industrial gas prices were the lowest in the European Union, an improvement from sixth lowest in 1990. Electricity prices were in the mid range of prices—seventh lowest—an improvement on 10th lowest in 1990.

Competitiveness

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total funding of the local competitiveness budget and sector challenge fund for the next financial year; and if he will list the allocation of these funds by region. [15002]

Mr. Page: The total funding for the local competitiveness budget in 1997–98 is £169 million. Allocations have been made to regions for the business link core services, regional supply network and investors in people parts of the budget. The level of expenditure in each region from the local challenge part of this budget will depend upon the quality of individual bids in each region. In addition, some of the budget is used at national level to support local activity, for example on business link publicity and on management best practice.

Region	*1997–98 DTI core services provision £*	*1997–98 regional supply network provision £*	*1997–98 DfEE investors in people provision £*
South East	11,433,953	373,000	7,765,000
London	10,852,241	253,000	11,374,000
Eastern	7,363,309	270,000	5,969,000
South West'	7,963,441	299,676	5,582,000
West Midlands	8,402,068	375,000	6,993,000
East Midlands	5,788,621	327,000	5,192,000

Region	1997–98 DTI core services provision £	1997–98 regional supply network provision £	1997–98 DfEE investors in people provision £
Yorkshire and Humberside	6,400,000	297,600	6,610,000
North West	8,750,000	383,000	2,015,000
Merseyside[2]	1,909,367	—	7,500,000
North East	3,700,000	157,594	3,199,000
National total	72,563,000	2,735,870	62,199,000

[1] South West regional supply network includes £12,626 for Devon and Cornwall regional supply office.
[2] Merseyside regional supply network provision is included in the figure for the north west.

Funding for the first round of sector challenge will amount to at least £30 million over three years. The actual expenditure in each year will be affected by the spend profile of the portfolio of successful bids. There is no prior allocation of the fund to different regions. The challenge is a UK-wide competition and the geographical location of organisations mounting successful bids may not relate directly to the regions in which benefits from those bids will accrue.

Ford UK

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he first met Ford UK to discuss the implications of the closure announcement at Halewood; and when he last met representatives of the company prior to the announcement. [15105]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* I met Jac Nasser, president of Ford Europe, to discuss future investment at Halewood on 16 January. Prior to that I met Sir Alex Trotman, chairman, president and chief executive of Ford Motor Company, on 2 March 1996.

My officials have frequent contact and meetings with the company.

Iveco Ford

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the Iveco Ford company at Langley; and if he will make a statement. [15106]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* Officials from my Department's automotive directorate have regular discussions with Iveco Ford's UK management, as well as with representatives of the company's parent organisation. The subjects under discussion are treated as confidential.

Prior Options Reviews

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total cost of the prior options reviews; and if he will make a statement. [15082]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The estimated total cost of conducting the prior options reviews, excluding the costs for the preparation of the privatisation of ADAS, the establishment of the health and safety laboratory as an internal agency of the Health and Safety Executive, and the conversion of three establishments into new executive agencies, is likely to be in the region of £1.5 million. This cost is small compared with the sum devoted to the establishments—some £690 million a year. The Government believe that to achieve further efficiency gains, which can only benefit the science base, this is a worthwhile investment.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Loyden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the percentage change in manufacturing output between *(a)* 1996 and 1995 and *(b)* 1995 and 1994. [15160]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* Manufacturing output was 2.2 per cent. higher in 1995 than it was in 1994. Last year it rose by a further 0.5 per cent. to reach its highest ever level. The Confederation of British Industry expects manufacturing output to grow by 3.4 per cent. in 1997.

North Sea Oil

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the oil discharged into the North sea derives from United Kingdom licensed offshore oil rigs and platforms. [14866]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* Figures from the Oslo and Paris commissions North sea quality status report, last published in 1993, indicate that the United Kingdom licensed offshore oil rigs and platforms were responsible for between 4 and 10 per cent. of the total oil input to the North sea.

Companies (Investigation)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is *(a)* the cost to date of each of the investigations currently being carried out under the Insurance Companies Acts, *(b)* the amounts which have been paid to each of the inspectors and *(c)* the basis on which they have been paid. [14913]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Investigations carried out under the Insurance Companies Acts are not announced and are confidential. Current inquiries are being carried out by departmental staff at no appreciable cost.

Money Laundering

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information his Department collects about the involvement of United Kingdom accountancy firms in facilitating money laundering. [14843]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Any information received by the Department in relation to money laundering is passed to the national criminal intelligence service.

Caparo Judgment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce legislation to reverse the Caparo judgment. [14790]

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no such plans, but continue to keep this issue under review.

Publicity

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was his Department's expenditure on staff

employed full-time or part-time to provide *(a)* publicity and *(b)* work on domestic press and media for inward investment in each year since 1979–80. [15367]

Mr. Greg Knight: Publicity in respect of inward investment is carried out by staff in various parts of the Department such as the Invest in Britain Bureau, information division and sector divisions but records are not kept at the level of detail required to provide the information requested.

Royal Ordnance, Chorley

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current situation regarding Konver grant for the Royal Ordnance site in Chorley. [15375]

Mr. Greg Knight: The Royal Ordnance site in Chorley has received European structural fund grants for projects from Konver I and Perifra. The Konver II working group for the north-west has been asked to consider the scope for offering some grant to support a further project on this site. I shall write to the hon. Member when this issue has been settled.

TRANSPORT

Road Schemes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the average time taken to complete major road schemes. [14572]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* Reducing the time taken to complete road schemes is an objective of the Highways Agency. Figures taken from the agency's annual report for 1995–96 are given in the table. They show the average time taken, from programme entry to completion, for schemes completed in each year.

1992–93: 15.0 years

1993–94: 11.9 years

1994–95: 11.4 years

1995–96: 13.4 years.

Of the 21 schemes analysed in 1995–96, five entered the programme over 20 years ago, one in 1969. If these schemes are taken out of the analysis, the average time reduces to 10.6 years, showing a gradual fall over the four-year period.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the longest time recorded to complete a road scheme begun after 1979. [14573]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* The longest time recorded to complete a road scheme begun after 1979 is 15 years. The A65 Burley-in-Wharfdale bypass in west Yorkshire entered the programme in 1980 and was completed in 1995.

London Transport Prestige Project

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the potential for third party revenue benefits from London Transport's prestige project. [15463]

Mr. Bowis: London Transport is responsible for the prestige project and is currently in negotiation with a private sector consortium on a potential deal. Third party revenues are one of the matters subject to negotiation, but London Transport believes that the project has the potential to generate significant third party revenues from smart-card ticketing.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes have been permitted in the dimensions of heavy goods vehicles since the increase in lorry weights to 38 tonnes was implemented. [15348]

Mr. Watts: The maximum permitted weight of lorries increased to 38 tonnes in 1983. Since that date, the maximum permitted length of an articulated vehicle increased from 15.5m to 16.5m in 1990 and the maximum length of a lorry and trailer increased from 18.0m to 18.35m in 1991. The maximum width for refrigerated vehicles increased from 2.5m to 2.58m in 1986 and then to 2.6m in 1988. The maximum width of other types of lorry increased from 2.5m to 2.55m in 1996.

Railtrack (Code of Conduct)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received in respect of a code of conduct for Railtrack; and if he will make a statement. [15343]

Mr. Watts: None.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the total costs incurred by the British Railways Board in the privatisation process in 1996–97 to date. [15400]

Mr. Watts: Details of the costs incurred by the British Railways Board in the privatisation process are a matter for the board itself. However, I understand from the board that up to 4 January 1997 the total costs incurred in 1996–97 were £40 million.

Level Crossing Grant

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what amount was paid to Railtrack in level crossing grant for 1996–97; and what is the forecast level of the grant for 1997–98. [15347]

Mr. Watts: No level crossing grant was paid to Railtrack for 1996–97 and no such grant is forecast to be paid in 1997–98. With effect from 1 April 1996, level crossing grant ceased to be payable to Railtrack, which recovers the costs of maintaining level crossings through the access charges paid by train operating companies.

Railways (Advice Costs)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the cost in 1996–97 of bought in advice for *(a)* the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and *(b)* the Office of the Rail Regulator. [15404]

Mr. Watts: My current estimate of these costs is *(a)* £32.2 million and *(b)* £1.2 million.

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the preferred bidder for the west coast main line franchise. [14896]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director announced the choice of the Virgin Rail Group as the preferred bidder on 7 February.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the west coast main line franchise to be let. [14895]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director's target date for the commencement of franchised operations is March 1997.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish the passenger service requirements for the west coast main line franchise; what plans he has for the modernisation of the line; and if he will make a statement. [14897]

Mr. Watts: The franchising director published the passenger service requirement on 11 February. He has entered into an infrastructure investment agreement with Railtrack which will allow for the operation of tilting trains and dramatically reduced journey times from 2002. This route represents an excellent opportunity for all parties. There are strong commercial incentives for the franchisee and Railtrack to build on it and develop an efficient, fast and competitive railway.

Emissions 2000 Directive

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to seek to amend the European Commission's current proposals in its emissions 2000 directive, so as to ensure that the tools and electronic codes relating to on-board diagnostics for motor vehicles are available to members of the public; and what information he has as to the public availability of such codes in other OECD countries. [15156]

Mr. Bowis: The Government are seeking to ensure that all diagnostic fault codes, electronic communication protocols and connector sockets are standardised to enable interrogation by standard off-board instruments used by the repair industry. We are working closely with other member states and the Commission to achieve this objective.

There is general agreement between member states that the fault codes should be based on a new ISO standard which will be publicly available. This standard is in turn based on a Society of Automotive Engineers standard which is already generally available in the United States.

Towing Vessels

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase the number of emergency towing vessels which patrol the southern English coast. [15001]

Mr. Bowis: The Coastguard agency has no plans to increase the number of emergency towing vessels which patrol this length of coast.

Vehicle Excise Duty Exemption

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the DSS allowances which qualify the recipients for vehicle excise duty exemption. [14388]

Mr. Bowis: The following DSS allowances currently qualify for vehicle excise duty exemption:

1. War pensioners mobility supplement;
2. Disability living allowance—
   a. for recipients of the higher rate of the mobility component;
   b. in respect of the care component;
3. Attendance allowance.

In the case of 2(b) and 3, however, only where the application for exemption was approved before 13 October 1993, and in the case of 3, only to those unable or virtually unable to walk.

SCOTLAND

Parkhead Hospital

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how he plans to respond to the recent report of the Scottish health advisory service on Parkhead hospital; and if he will make a statement. [13212]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Greater Glasgow health board and the Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS trust have developed a comprehensive action plan to address the issues highlighted in the SHAS report. Many of the required service improvements had been addressed by the trust before the report was published. The health board is monitoring progress on all the recommendations.

Mr. Ian Dutton

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department spent on its contract with Thompson Partners in relation to the eventual recruitment of Mr. Ian Dutton; and what is the projected expenditure on the contract. [14151]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 5 February 1997]:* Five thousand pounds was paid to Thompson Partners in respect of its work to identify persons who might be suitable to carry out the consultancy relating to self-governing schools matters.

The projected expenditure on this consultancy is between £30,000 and £45,000.

Skye Toll Bridge

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has issued a report in respect of the Skye toll bridge in accordance with section 41 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991; and if he will make a statement. [14627]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes. Reports were laid before the House on 16 July 1992, 20 July 1993 and 28 June 1996.

Crofting Townships (Woodland Planting)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the crofting townships which have applied to plant woodland on common grazing in each year since 1992, indicating in each case the number of hectares. [14644]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The townships which have applied to plant woodland are listed. Not all of these areas have been approved for grants.

Township/common grazing	*Area (hectares)*
1993	
None	
1994	
Allt-Nan-Subh	59
Camusluinie 1	72
Marybank/Maryhill	15
Sandwick (East Street)	100
Scallasaig	49
Tong/Aird	114
1995	
Borve/Annishader	20
Calligary	10
Camusluinie 2	48
Culvid Wood	30
Doire-Aonar	52
Galson	30
Kylerhea	6
Sandwick (North Street)	100
Toscaig	122
1996	
Achorn	4
Allt-Nan-Subh	59
Ardmore	16
Ardvourlie	100
Backies	64
Borve and Annishadder 2	64
Creag Dharaich	167
Heather Parks	20
Feorlig	100
Fideach	10
Garrabost and New Garrabost	74
Glen	25
Luskentyre	4
Penifiler	6
Upper Coll	100
Strathcannaird	9
Vatten	61
1997 (to date)	
Camusluinie 3	25
Halladale	6
Laxay	48
Loch Crocach	136
Melbost and Branahuie	65
Modsarie	9
Satran	3
Scoraig	104
Shieldaig	1
Tarvie	155

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of Government grant paid to support woodland planting on common grazing in crofting townships in each year since 1992. [14643]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The information is set out in the table:

Year ending 31 March	*Grants paid (£000)*
1993	Nil
1994	106
1995	106
1996	260
1997 (to date)	309

Algrade Trust

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make the Scottish Charities Office report on the affairs of the Algrade Trust available for inspection by legal representatives of the families of residents formerly at the Humbie home. [14938]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the Adjournment debate on 3 February 1997 before the Scottish Grand Committee, *Official Report,* Scottish *Grand Committee,* 3 February 1997, columns 41–50. It is not the practice of the Crown Office to make public reports on confidential inquiries into charities for the reasons set out in that speech.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what payments have been made by the Algrade Trust to Lothian regional council or the East Lothian council for repairs, redecoration and furnishing at Wedderburn house at Inveresk. [14940]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not known to the Charities Office and was not necessary for the purposes of the investigation. It is a matter for the present trustees.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the plans of the Algrade Trust for the application of its £1.2 million accumulated profit. [14942]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: These funds are already being used to fund the facilities at Wedderburn. The detailed application of funds is a matter for the present trustees.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the properties bequeathed to the Algrade Trust, or to one or more individual trustees of that body, by residents or relatives of residents who were at the Humbie home. [14937]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am advised by my noble Friend the Lord Advocate that there are no known heritable properties which have been bequeathed to the Algrade Trust or to one or more individual trustees of that body by residents or relatives of residents who were at the Humbie home.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what payments have been made by the Algrade Trust to the Church of Scotland board of social responsibility for the care of residents at and from the Humbie home in 1995 and 1996. [14939]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not known to the Charities Office and was not necessary for the purposes of the investigation. It is a matter for the present trustees.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what profits were generated by the Algrade Trust in each year between 1969 and 1995. [14941]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The accumulated surplus income over expenditure is £1.2 million, as explained in my speech at the Adjournment debate. The further information sought is not readily available and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. The information comes within the confidentiality of the investigation.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the instances of maladministration at the Algrade Trust which have been identified by the Scottish Charities Office. [14926]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The accounts were not up to the standard required by the supervision legislation. There was an inability on the part of the trustees to cope with management responsibilities owing to their advancing years. The trustees had the benefit of remuneration from the trust. There was a reluctance over many years to work with the supervisory social work department.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provision has been made by the Algrade Trust for residents from the Humbie home following their transfer to the care of the Church of Scotland board of social responsibility. [14927]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The responsibility for the residents remains with the Algrade Trust and not with the Church of Scotland board of social responsibility, which acts as the agent of the Algrade Trust in the day-to-day management of the premises and is paid for its services.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the charitable works and responsibilities undertaken by the Algrade Trust since the beginning of 1996. [14928]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The charitable works and responsibilities of the trust remain as they have always been. That is principally the provision of care for residents.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the staffing costs of the Algrade Trust of £2.2 million from 1969 to 1995 to show the number of staff and the expenditure in each year expressed in total and per resident. [14929]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information comes within the confidentiality of the investigation. The information is not readily available and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the food and household costs of the Algrade Trust of £0.8 million between 1969 and 1995 to show the expenditure each year expressed in total and per resident. [14930]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information comes within the confidentiality of the investigation. The information is not readily available and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the property maintenance costs of the Algrade Trust of £0.86 million between 1969 and 1995 to show the expenditure in each year expressed in total and per resident. [14931]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not readily available and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. The information comes within the confidentiality of the investigation.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the transport and administration costs of the Algrade Trust of £1.2 million between 1969 and 1995 to show the expenditure each year expressed in total and per resident. [14932]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information comes within the confidentiality of the investigation. The information is not readily available and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the spending of the Algrade Trust of £0.24 million on pocket money for residents between 1969 and 1995 to show the expenditure in each year expressed in total and per resident. [14933]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not readily available and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. The information comes within the confidentiality of the investigation.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the 14 properties acquired by the former Algrade trustees, giving *(a)* the dates of acquisition and purchase prices, *(b)* where relevant, the dates of disposal and sale price, and *(c)* the valuation in 1996 of those still owned by the trust. [14934]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There were 13 properties purchased by the trustees. A further property, the Good Templar hall, known as the Gospel hall, was a gift. The value of these properties in 1996 is not known. So far as the 14 properties referred to in the Adjournment debate are concerned, the dates of acquisitions and purchase prices and the dates of disposal and sale are set out in the following schedule:

Date of property	Date of acquisition	Price	Sale	Price
1. 9 Upper Keith Cottage, Humbie	18 May 1979	£18,000	Not applicable	Not applicable
2. 1–2 Cockburn Square, Pathhead	28 October 1983	£36,000	2 June 1990	£36,000
3. Browseat (Maranatha), Humbie	2 December 1983	£46,000	Not applicable	Not applicable
4. Good Templar Hall, Pathhead (known as The Gospel Hall)	20 April 1984	No consideration	16 June 1990	No consideration
5. Algrade school	21 September 1988	£300,000	Not applicable	Not applicable
6. 10 Upper Keith Cottage, Humbie	Constructed by Algrade Trust	Not applicable	21 July 1989	£26,000
7. 11 Upper Keith Cottage, Humbie	Constructed by Algrade Trust	Not applicable	21 July 1989	£26,000
8. 29 Oxenfoord Drive, Pathhead	4 June 1990	£99,500	Not applicable	Not applicable
9. 44 Main Street, Pathhead	10 December 1992	£67,162	Not applicable	Not applicable
10. 46 Main Street, Pathhead	10 December 1992	£67,162	Not applicable	Not applicable
11. 34 Main Street, Pathhead	16 March 1993	£17,500	1993—No disposition followed conclusion of missives, although the price was paid	£17,500
12. 1 Chapel Close, Pathhead	12 October 1994	£110,000	Not applicable	Not applicable
13. 40 Main Street, Pathhead	25 November 1994	£69,500	Not applicable	Not applicable
14. 42 Main Street, Pathhead	25 November 1994	£69,500	Not applicable	Not applicable

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on property transactions between the Algrade Trust and trustees of that body, showing the date of conveyance and the price received or paid for each property. [14935]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the first five undernoted transactions, the trust transferred the properties to the trustees. In the final case, the property was acquired by the trust by way of gift:

Property	Date	Price £
10 Upper Keith Cottage, Humbie	21 July 1989	26,000
11 Upper Keith Cottage, Humbie	21 July 1989	26,000
1/2 Cockburn Square, Pathhead	2 June 1990	36,000
34 Main Street, Pathhead 1993[1]	£17,500	—
The Good Templar Hall, Pathhead	16 June 1990	No consideration
Copsewood, Shore Road, Tighnabruaich	30 October 1974	No consideration

[1] No disposition followed conclusion of missives although the price was paid.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the value of the property of the Algrade Trust at the former Humbie home; what conditions affecting the sale of that property are included in its title deeds; and if the trust has plans to sell it. [14936]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current value of the property is not known. The sale of the property is a matter for the trustees. The exact conditions attached to sales are not readily available and cannot be ascertained except at disproportionate cost. They are contained within the title deeds of the property which are publicly available at the Registers of Scotland.

Self-governing Schools

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total budget allocation for self-governing schools in Scotland for each of the past three years; and what is the budget for expenditure in the current year. [15173]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is as follows:

1994–95: £429,000

1995–96: £559,000

1996–97: £741,000 (Estimated outturn).

These figures include annual recurrent grants, capital and other current grants payable in each financial year to Dornoch academy and St. Mary's episcopal primary school, since they became self-governing schools on 1 April 1994 and 20 October 1995 respectively. No expenditure is expected in 1996–97 in respect of Fort William primary school, which becomes a self-governing school on 1 August 1997.

WALES

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total cost of local government reorganisation in Wales on the latest date for which information is available; how much has been spent on redundancy payments; how many newly appointed chief executives have taken early retirement less than one year after the reorganisation; and if he will make a statement. [14590]

Mr. Hague: The total cost of local government reorganisation is not available centrally. However, up to and including the current financial year, £87.5 million has been made available to local authorities as a contribution to reorganisation-related costs. A further £17.9 million will be available in 1997–98. Of the total available to support reorganisation, £28.3 million has been earmarked for related redundancy costs, of which £19.3 million has been spent. A further £10.1 million will be made available in 1997–98.

To date, no newly appointed chief executive has taken early retirement.

Nurses' Pay

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from people in Wales on the subject of the pay review in respect of Welsh nurses; and if he will make a statement. [14414]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. The recommended pay increase of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Pay Review Body has been accepted and will be implemented in two stages from 1 April and 1 December 1997.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14467]

Mr. Hague: The number of staff in my Department who provide advice on equal opportunities is 1.5, full-time equivalent, at a cost of £35,610 for 1996–97.

NHS Salaries and Wages

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list NHS salaries and wages costs for *(a)* general and senior managers, *(b)* nurses and midwives and *(c)* administrative and clerical staff for the financial years (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96. [14597]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested on NHS salaries and wages costs is as follows:

£000

	1994–95	*1995–96*
(a) General/senior managers	38,753	42,605
(b) Nurses and midwives	433,661	442,604
(c) Administrative and clerical staff	110,620	118,049

Source:
Annual Accounts/Financial Returns of Welsh Health bodies.

Dr. William Price

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with Cadw its decision not to take steps to safeguard the birthplace of Dr. William Price, near Machen; and if he will make a statement. [14685]

Mr. Hague: Cadw's assessment of the Greenmeadow inn, Waterloo, Machen, has been made by reference to the criteria applied in the identification of all buildings of special architectural or historic importance.

The building's probable association with Dr. William Price and his place in Welsh history, which is not disputed, have been important considerations in the assessment. But the extent of that association and the building's architectural characteristics do not amount to a case which would justify statutory protection.

Health Service Vacancies

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many vacancies there are currently for *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses in NHS hospitals in (i) Clwyd and (ii) Powys; and if he will make a statement. [14891]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Green Belts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his policy on green belts for Wales. [15146]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: "Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy", which was published in May 1996, contains Government planning policy guidance on green belts in Wales.

A465 (Accidents)

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *290*, on accidents on the A465 since 1979, how many non-personal injury accidents there were during this period. [14885]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Only data on personal injury road accidents are forwarded to the Welsh Office. South Wales police do not compile statistics on non-personal injury road accidents.

Correspondence

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to reply to the letter of 9 January from Mrs. Betty Williams concerning the proposed development at Llandudno. [15252]

Mr. Hague: Mrs. Williams's letter was not received by the Welsh Office until 28 January; a reply will be sent by 19 February.

Capital Challenge

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his oral statement of 12 December, *Official Report*, column 407, if he will make a statement on the tourist development in Llandudno which he proposes to support under the Welsh capital challenge. [15251]

Mr. Hague: The joint public-private sector project sponsored by Conwy county borough council to provide a street tramway in Llandudno was successful in gaining support under Welsh capital challenge along with the other projects which I approved because they best meet the scheme's criteria for support.

Claimant Numbers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many families in Wales draw child benefit; and if he will make a statement; [13876]

(2) how many pensioners in Wales received the Christmas bonus; and if he will make a statement. [13895]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I have been asked to reply.

The administration of child benefit and the Christmas bonus is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Barry Jones, dated 6 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many families in Wales draw Child Benefit and how many pensioners in Wales received the Christmas Bonus.

At 30 September 1996 there were 350,000 families in Wales in receipt of Child Benefit. This figure is based on a one percent sample of the Child Benefit computer system, rounded to the nearest thousand and excludes late notifications of children returning to full time education.

To receive payment of the Christmas Bonus, a pensioner must be entitled to one of the following benefits for a period which includes a day in a prescribed week in December:- 'Retirement Pension (RP), Income Support (for those over state pension age), Widows Pension (WP), Incapacity Benefit Long Term (IBLT), Attendance Allowance (AA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Invalid Care Allowance (ICA), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), and War Widows' Pensions'. Beneficiaries may receive a second payment for their partner if they are both over state pensionable age and they are entitled to an increase to the qualifying benefit for that person.

At 31 March 1996 there were approximately 533,000 people in Wales in receipt of RP. At 24 February 1996 there were approximately 14,000 pensioners, including partners, in receipt of Income Support in Wales. This figure includes claims where a partner of a customer is a pensioner, but the customer is not, and the partner has no qualification for the christmas bonus. These figures are based on five per cent samples.

At 31 March 1996 there were 3000 pensioners in receipt of WP and at 31 August 1996 there were 23,000 pensioners in receipt of IBLT, in Wales. The number of pensioners in receipt of AA, DLA, ICA, SDA and War Widows Pension could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Figures are given for the latest dates available and are rounded to the nearest thousand.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Ostriches

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ostriches have been slaughtered for consumption in each of the last 12 months; what quantity is exported abroad; and if he will make a statement. [13623]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The slaughter of ostriches for human consumption must be carried out in a slaughterhouse licensed under the poultry meat hygiene regulations or in exempt on-farm premises which comply with general food hygiene legislation.

Slaughterhouses are licensed by the respective Agriculture Department. To date the Ministry has not granted any slaughterhouse in England a licence to handle ostriches. Small numbers will have been killed in exempt on-farm premises during the last 12 months, but no figures are available. Meat produced in exempt premises is not eligible for export.

Post-Chernobyl Restrictions

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the names and areas of the holdings *(a)* which have been exempted from the post-Chernobyl restrictions following the announcement of 22 January and *(b)* which still remain under restrictions. [14367]

Mr. Boswell: The total area under restrictions in Cumbria following the announcement on 22 January 1997 is approximately 12,200 hectares comprising 48 holdings. Within this area 37 holdings covering about 9,230 hectares have been granted exemptions from the provisions of the order and 11 holdings covering about 2,970 hectares still remain under controls.

It has not been the policy of the Agriculture Department to release the names of individual holdings.

Animal Feed

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the use of animal protein in feed for animals intended for human consumption was banned in *(a)* the Irish Republic and *(b)* each of the other EU countries. [14775]

Mrs. Browning: In Ireland the use of mammalian protein in ruminant feedstuffs was first prohibited from 13 August 1990.

We do not have detailed information on the legislation in place in each of the other member states. Community decision 94/381 of 27 June 1994 required all member states to ban the feeding of mammalian protein to ruminants. In member states with a system which makes it possible to distinguish between protein from ruminant and non-ruminant species—such as Denmark—the ban is limited to the feeding of ruminant protein to ruminants.

We are not aware of any controls in other member states on the feeding of mammalian protein to animals for human consumption other than ruminants.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14808]

Mr. Boswell: The Department uses the Royal Mail's postcode address file to validate name and address data in relation to certain grants and subsidies payments to farmers and is considering further opportunities in this area. The potential for using the postcode to geo-reference agricultural holding data is also under consideration.

BSE

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of BSE have been identified in imported cattle. [14773]

Mrs. Browning: We have confirmed BSE in 10 animals imported from other member states. No cases have been recorded from other countries. It is possible that all but one of these animals were infected with BSE in the UK. There is only one case where infection in the country of origin seems probable, its period of residence in the United Kingdom being too short to permit development of disease.

A further imported case is currently under investigation.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many instances of BSE in cattle have been reported in the Irish Republic in each of the past 10 years. [14772]

Mrs. Browning: the number of confirmed cases of BSE in cattle reported in the Republic of Ireland since the first case was reported is:

Year	*Confirmed cases of BSE*
1989	15
1990	14
1991	17
1992	18
1993	16
1994	19
1995	16
1996	73
Total	188

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what control measures to ensure that the cohorts of imported cattle which develop BSE are traced in their country of origin have been notified to his Department. [14774]

Mrs. Browning: In cases where it is believed that an imported animal was infected with BSE in its country of origin, the chief veterinary officer of the country concerned will be notified, and an epidemiological report requested. If it is established that the animal has been infected there, it will be for the veterinary authorities in that country to take appropriate action in relation to animals associated with that case. Where the imported animal has been infected in this country, there will be no tracing back to the country of origin.

Notifiable Disease

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of cases of each notifiable disease over the past five years. [14857]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* The number of cases of each notifiable disease over the last five years is as follows:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Anthrax[1]	2	2	3	1	3
Avian Influenza[2]	1	0	0	0	0
Contagious Equine Metritis[1]	0	0	0	0	14
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy	36,682	34,370	23,994	14,298	[3]7,202
Brucellosis	0	1	0	0	0
Enzootic Bovine Leukosis	4	63	26	7	5
Equine Viral Arteritis	0	0	0	0	1
Paramyxovirus of pigeons[2]	157	103	36	26	22
Newcastle Disease[2]	0	0	0	0	1
Rabies	0	0	0	0	[4]1
Scrapie	[5]—	327	199	163	[3]207
Tuberculosis (in cattle)[6]	155	274	362	449	[7]—
Tuberculosis (in Deer)[6]	1	1	1	2	[7]—
Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (in rabbits)[8]	2	10	200	512	[8]269
Warble Fly	0	0	0	2	0

[1] Figures denote number of outbreaks which may involve more than one animal.
[2] Figures denote outbreaks in flocks which may involve more than one bird.
[3] Provisional.
[4] One case of European Bat Lyssavirus 2 which did not affect the UK's status as a rabies free country.
[5] Scrapie only became a notifiable disease on 1 January 1993.
[6] Figures denote confirmed herd breakdowns which may involve more than one animal.
[7] Figures not available until June 1997.
[8] Viral haemorrhagic disease of rabbits ceased to be a notifiable disease on 21 October 1996.

Rabies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the reports into the possible danger of introducing rabies in imported animals carried out *(a)* by the European Commission in 1991 and *(b)* by the New Zealand Department of Agriculture in 1994; and if he will place copies of those reports in the Library. [14983]

Mrs. Browning: Both reports are being taken into account in the current review of rabies control policy. Copies of the reports have already been placed in the Library.

Beef Waste

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the locations of landfill sites where non-domestic beef waste products have been landfilled in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996, and the quantity, in tonnes, at each site; [15411]

(2) how many tonnes of beef, and beef products, have been disposed of to landfill in each year since 1979; [15409]

(3) what regulations govern the disposal to landfill of *(a)* beef and beef products from household food waste, *(b)* beef bought by the Intervention Board, *(c)* specified bovine material, *(d)* cattle diagnosed with BSE and *(e)* ash from BSE infected cattle which have been incinerated. [15410]

Mr. Baldry: The landfilling of waste is governed by the terms of waste management licences issued by the Environment Agency under section 35 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990—the 1990 Act—which, among other matters, specifies the types of waste and quantities of waste which may be disposed of in each

site. Operators of landfill sites are required by paragraph 14 of schedule 4 to the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994—the 1994 regulations—to:

(a) keep a record of the quantity, nature and origin of the waste which they dispose of;

(b) to make that information available, on request, to the Environment Agency;

(c) to comply with the duty of care under section 34 of the 1990 Act and the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991.

The Environment Agency is required by section 64 of the 1990 Act and regulation 10 of the 1994 regulations to maintain a public register of licensed landfill sites. It does not, however, hold centrally information about the types and quantities of waste disposed of in landfill sites and this could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Regarding cattle waste potentially infected with BSE, cattle suspected of showing clinical signs of the disease are disposed of by direct incineration in plants contracted to MAFF which are subject to authorisation by the Environment Agency or relevant local authority under part I of the 1990 Act. Specified bovine material, the tissues most likely to contain any BSE infectivity, is removed from cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme or for human consumption and consigned for rendering or direct incineration.

The independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee has considered the current and proposed methods of dealing with waste material from the slaughter of cattle and concluded that these are safe. A press release reporting its conclusions was issued by MAFF on 7 June 1996 and a copy is available in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the incinerators and *(b)* power stations and their locations which have been considered for burning the rendered remains of BSE cattle slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme. [15406]

Mr. Baldry: BSE suspects are not slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme—OTMS, this is expressly prohibited under Commission regulation 716/96. Such animals are slaughtered and their carcases sent for direct incineration.

Regarding the destruction of the rendered remains of cattle slaughtered under the OTMS, currently only one commercial incinerator—Rechem at Fawley, Hampshire—is burning meat and bonemeal derived from OTMS cattle and the rendering company, Prosper De Mulder at Widnes, is currently burning a small amount of OTMS tallow. However, a number of proposals should emerge from a tender exercise initiated by the Intervention Board in December 1996 which, subject to satisfactory trials, should increase existing incineration capacity for burning MBM—meat and bonemeal—and tallow.

Combustion trials have been carried out at PowerGen's test facilities at Ratcliffe on Soar, Nottinghamshire, and National Power's test facilities at Didcot, Oxfordshire to establish the feasibility of burning rendered animal waste in power stations under a strict protocol set by the Environment Agency. The fact that trials have been conducted at these sites, however, does not imply that the adjacent power stations would necessarily be chosen for full-scale burning. The test results will be fully evaluated, before any decision is reached on the way forward and an announcement will be made to Parliament. Full weight will be given in any such decision to the protection of human health and the environment.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the incinerators and their locations which have been licensed to burn the rendered remains of BSE cattle slaughtered under the over 30-months-scheme. [15405]

Mr. Baldry: BSE suspects are not slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme—OTMS. This is expressly prohibited under Commission regulation 716/96. Such animals are slaughtered and their carcases sent for direct incineration.

The high temperature incinerator at Fawley, Hampshire, which is operated by Rechem International Ltd., is authorised by the Environment Agency under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to burn MBM from over-30-months scheme cattle. The Intervention Board executive agency has agreed a contract with the company for the incineration of MBM at this site.

The rendering company Prosper De Mulder, at Widnes, is currently burning a small amount of OTMS tallow and is authorised by the relevant local authority.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

BSE

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what research was *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by his Department on the threat of BSE to human beings; and if he will make a statement on the extent to which such research is being co-ordinated (i) with other countries and (ii) by the European Union Commission. [14273]

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has commissioned an extensive programme of research to support control measures for BSE and to protect both human and animal health. A list of this research has been placed in the Library of the House. The results of the research are evaluated by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee which also advises the Government on future research.

Research commissioned by MAFF is complemented by the research programmes of the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council, the Department of Health, the Scottish Office Department of Health and the Wellcome Trust. This research in the UK is now co-ordinated through the transmissible spongiform encephalopathy research funders group. A new high-level committee has been set up in the Cabinet Office whose task is to ensure that the TSE research programme progresses as rapidly and effectively as possible.

Research in the EU is co-ordinated through the offices of directorate general XII and directorate general VI. This was consolidated in November 1996 on the basis of a report from an advisory committee on TSE research requirements in Europe. A call has been made for research proposals on TSEs under the framework IV programme

to cover areas identified as requiring further research. Programme co-ordinators from the UK have made a significant input to the EU advisory committee and the standing committees dealing with the research.

The number of centres actively engaged in TSE research in other European countries is relatively small, but expanding. The research scientists and programme managers in the UK are in constant communication with the centres in European and other countries and there is exchange of information, ideas, materials and, where appropriate, direct collaboration. There is no formal international co-ordination so far, and each country largely supports the research required to meet its national requirements.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dangerous Driving

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average sentence for motorists who caused a driving-related fatality and had been charged with causing death by dangerous driving, in each of the last five years; [14924]

(2) what percentage of drivers convicted of a road traffic offence in which someone has died were indicted on the charge of *(a)* careless and inconsiderate driving and *(b)* causing death by dangerous driving, in each of the last five years; [14922]

(3) how many drivers have been charged, in the last year for which figures are available, with careless and inconsiderate driving after causing a death on the roads; [14875]

(4) what was the average sentence for motorists who caused a driving-related fatality and had been charged with careless and inconsiderate driving, in each of the last five years; [14923]

(5) if he will list the number of occasions on which drivers being charged with causing death by dangerous driving, have had the alternative verdict of careless and inconsiderate driving substituted by the court, in the last five years. [14876]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answers 10 February 1997]:* The available information is shown in the table.

Information on the original charges brought and original offences contained in indictments are not available centrally. The information contained in the table, therefore, is based on the offence for which the court took its final decision. Nor is it known centrally whether careless driving prosecutions involve a fatality.

Motoring offences of 'causing death' 1991—95

England and Wales — *Number of offences*

Offence type	*Causing death by reckless/dangerous driving*[1]				
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Prosecutions	431	339	352	301	305
Total convictions	360	320	258	234	247
of which:					
Non-custodial sentences	97	99	72	56	67
Custodial sentences	263	221	186	178	180
Average custodial sentence (months)	19	22	23	28	36

[1] The Road Traffic Act 1991, effective from 1 July 1992, amended the charge of "causing death by reckless driving" to one of "causing death by dangerous driving" and added a new offence of "causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs".

England and Wales — *Number of offences*

Offence type	*Causing death by careless driving under the influence of drink or drugs*[1]				
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Prosecutions	—	6	63	48	51
Total convictions	—	1	29	49	52
of which:					
Non-custodial sentences	—	—	9	5	8
Custodial sentences	—	1	20	44	44
Average custodial sentence (months)	—	21	20	31	35

[1] The Road Traffic Act 1991, effective from 1 July 1992, amended the charge of "causing death by reckless driving" to one of "causing death by dangerous driving" and added a new offence of "causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs".

England and Wales — *Number of offences*

Offence type	*Causing death by aggravated vehicle taking*[1]				
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Prosecutions	—	111	27	26	13
Total convictions	—	49	26	24	24
of which:					
Non-custodial sentences	—	33	5	7	4
Custodial sentences	—	16	21	17	20
Average custodial sentence (months)	—	9	18	17	17

[1] Offence added by the Aggravated Vehicle Taking Act 1992, effective from 1 April 1992.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters of complaint have been received by His Department in respect of lenient sentences for drivers who have been involved in causing a driving-related fatality; and what percentage of all letters of complaint received by his Department this represented in the last year for which figures are available. [14879]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* During 1996, the Home Office received in the region of 200 letters from hon. Members and 1,300 letters from members of the public about the sentencing decisions of the courts. Of these, 31 or 15 per cent. and 20 or 1.5 per cent. respectively concerned what were perceived to be lenient sentences for drivers involved in a driving-related fatality.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of drivers convicted of a driving-related fatality in *(a)* the

five years preceding the implementation of the Road Traffic Act 1991 and *(b)* the five years following that implementation. [14878]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* The available information relates to the number of convictions in England and Wales for causing death by reckless driving between 1987 and 1991, and for causing death by dangerous driving, causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs and causing death by aggravated vehicle taking between 1992 and 1995; the Road Traffic Act 1991 was effective from 1 July 1992.

The information is as follows:

Convictions for causing death by dangerous driving etc. England and Wales

	Number
1987	322
1988	272
1989	379
1990	358
1991	360
1992	370
1993	313
1994	306
1995	323

Figures for 1996 are not yet available.

Dog Breeders

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *754-55*, if local authorities can impose licence conditions on dog breeders who own licensed establishments. [15449]

Mr. Sackville: In considering whether to grant a licence under the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973, a local authority is required to ensure that the following conditions are met:

that the dogs will at all times be kept in accommodation suitable as respects construction, size of quarters, number of occupants, exercising facilities, temperature, lighting, ventilation and cleanliness;

that the dogs will be adequately supplied with suitable food, drink and bedding material, adequately exercised and, so far as necessary, visited at suitable intervals;

that all reasonable precautions will be taken to prevent and control the spread among dogs of infectious or contagious diseases;

that appropriate steps will be taken for the protection of the dogs in case of fire or other emergency; and

that all appropriate steps will be taken to secure that the dogs will be provided with suitable food, drink and bedding material and adequately exercised when being transported to or from the breeding establishment.

A local authority has discretion to specify other relevant conditions, and can withhold a licence if any condition so specified is not met.

Rochester Prison

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many immigration detainees are currently held in HMP Rochester; [13284]

(2) on what date inmates on hunger strike in HMP Rochester first refused food; [13285]

(3) how many immigration detainees are currently refusing food in HMP Rochester; [13286]

(4) if he will list the nationalities and immigration status of the prisoners currently on hunger strike at HMP Rochester; [13287]

(5) if he will list the number of prisoners, by category and status, currently on hunger strike in each of Her Majesty's prisons; and if he will make a statement; [13288]

(6) what medical facilities from *(a)* HMP medical service and *(b)* the NHS have been offered to prisoners refusing food at HMP Rochester; [13289]

(7) what general visiting restrictions currently apply at HMP Rochester; and if he will make a statement; [13292]

(8) what recent visits have been made to HMP Rochester by *(a)* Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons and *(b)* officials from his Department. [13293]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 29 January 1997]:* As of 10 February 1997, 169 Immigration Act detainees were held at Rochester detainee centre, Her Majesty's prison Rochester. Meal refusals began on 6 January, when some 70 detainees on D wing started to refuse prison food in protest at their detention under Immigration Act powers. Since that time, there has been a gradual and steady return to eating. At 0800 hours on 10 February, three detainees were refusing food, although the numbers fluctuate.

It would be contrary to normal practice to give the details of individual detainees, but the three food refusers at Rochester comprise two illegal entrants and one passenger refused entry.

Excluding the immigration detainees who are refusing food at Rochester detainee centre, the details of other people held in prison refusing prison prepared meals are as follows:

Bristol: one category A male on remand

Belmarsh: one sentenced category A male

Dartmoor: one sentenced category C male

There is a well equipped health care centre at Rochester prison and detainees have access to medical care comparable with that which would be provided by a general practitioner. There is medical officer cover 24 hours per day, either within the prison or "on call" supported by 24-hour nursing cover. This includes a nurse attending each day between 9am and 9pm specifically allocated to the immigration detainees who are refusing food.

Detainees can apply to see the medical officer at any time, and can be admitted to the health care centre if their health gives cause for concern. Where appropriate, the medical officer will arrange for a detainee to be referred under guard for national health service treatment. To date, four of the detainees originally refusing food and fluids have received treatment at the Medway hospital, and one has been admitted to the Maidstone hospital and one to the Stockton Hall hospital.

Domestic visits for immigration detainees at Rochester prison occur from Monday to Saturday between 2pm and 4.30pm, during which time up to three adults and children

may visit. There are no restrictions on the number of visits, but visits must be booked in advance. No visiting orders are required. Legal representatives may visit from Monday to Friday between 9am and 11.30am or between 2pm and 4.30pm, but such visits must be booked in advance.

A full inspection of Rochester prison by a team from Her Majesty's inspectorate of prisons took place in the week commencing 30 October 1995.

The area manager for Kent visited the establishment on 10 October 1996, 29 November 1996 and 14 January 1997, and a director of the immigration service visited on 22 October 1996. The director of operations visited on Wednesday 5 February and the Director General of the Prison Service on 7 February. Immigration officials attend the establishment daily to deal with questions from immigration detainees about their cases. There are also periodic visits by other staff from the immigration and nationality department.

Police Complaints Authority Reports

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his policy on the publication of report of the Police Complaints Authority; [14419]

(2) if he will place in the Library the full report of the Police Complaints Authority into the death of Ibrahima Sey in Redbridge; and if he will make a statement. [14418]

Mr. Maclean: Reports of investigations supervised by the Police Complaints Authority are not published. The courts have held that the public disclosure of investigating officers' reports would have an undesirable inhibiting effect on their content.

Pepper Sprays

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the Home Office's current guidance to police forces on the use of pepper sprays; when this policy was last reviewed; what scientific evidence was evaluated in formulating this guidance; and in what circumstances police forces are permitted to use such sprays; [14462]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report, columns* 43–44, for what reasons the Home Office police scientific development branch started reviewing all available data relating to the health effects of oleoresin capsicum in early 1991. [14461]

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office has not issued any guidance to police forces on the use of pepper spray. It is for chief police officers to decide what defensive equipment to issue to their officers. None has issued pepper sprays.

The use of any force is the responsibility of the individual officer concerned, and is governed by section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967, which provides that a person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime, or in effecting the lawful arrest of suspected offenders.

The Home Office police scientific development branch initially reviewed data on the effects of oleoresin capsicum on human health in response to a request from the Association of Chief Police Officers to consider its use to incapacitate ferocious dogs used by drug dealers.

Pet Animals Act

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conditions local authorities may place on licences granted to premises under the Pet Animals Act 1951. [15424]

Mr. Sackville: Section 1(3) of the Pet Animals Act 1951 confers a wide discretion on local authorities to take into account any relevant factor in determining the suitability of individual premises.

Departmental Decisions (Judicial Review)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many decisions by his Department were challenged through judicial review in each Session since 1991–92; and in how many cases *(a)* the Department's decision was upheld by the court, *(b)* the court found for the applicant, *(c)* the Department submitted to the judgment and *(d)* the Department appealed successfully against the judicial review decisions. [14375]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office has been involved in several thousand judicial review applications since 1991–92 and has been successful in more than 90 per cent. of them. The detailed information requested is not readily available.

Firearms Certificates

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Lord Cullen's recommendation that the Government consult on the role which police surgeons might play in advising chief officers of police on applications for firearms certificates. [15564]

Mr. Howard: In their response to Lord Cullen's inquiry—Cm 3392—the Government accepted Lord Cullen's recommendation that interested bodies should be consulted on this issue. I have duly consulted the Association of Chief Police Officers, the British Medical Association and the British Shooting Sports Council, but there has been no support for it from any of these parties. All saw practical or ethical difficulties with the idea. The Association of Police Surgeons has since withdrawn this proposal in view of lack of support for it in other parts of the medical profession.

I am grateful to the Association of Police Surgeons for its constructive efforts in seeking a way of resolving these difficult questions, but I have concluded that this is not a proposal which can be taken further.

Police Complaints Authority (Appointments)

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new appointments have been made to the Police Complaints Authority. [15565]

Mr. Howard: Mr. Alan Potts has accepted my invitation to serve as a member of the Police Complaints Authority. Mr. Potts previously served as chief executive of Arun district council. He will serve for three years, with effect from 6 January 1997.

Money Laundering

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the incidents of money laundering referred to the National Criminal Intelligence Service during 1996–97, indicating the sources of information and the number of referrals about and from *(a)* accountants and *(b)* lawyers. [14784]

Mr. Maclean: The total number of disclosures of suspicious financial transactions made to the National Criminal Intelligence Service under the money laundering legislation so far in the present financial year is 11,610. Disclosures have been made by:

Accountants and solicitors

Banks and building societies

Bureaux de change

Credit/payment companies

Financial regulators

Gaming organisations

Independent financial advisers

Insurance companies

Motor groups

Others'

' Sources which individually make up less than 0.2 per cent. of the total number of disclosures and which are not recorded separately.

NCIS does not record the profession of individuals to whom financial disclosures relate. However, of the total number of financial disclosures received, accountants have submitted 44 and solicitors 217.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest estimate of the number of persons who *(a)* having applied for political asylum are awaiting (i) first determination or (ii) determination of an appeal or judicial review and *(b)* are awaiting departure or deportation; and if he will list the number and distributions of all such categories in local authority areas of the United Kingdom. [14955]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 31 December 1996, there were 55,635 applications for asylum in the United Kingdom awaiting an initial decision. As at the same date, 1,340 asylum appeals were awaiting validation and preparation by the asylum directorate and 20,455 asylum appeals were awaiting a hearing by adjudicators at the Immigration Appeals Authority. In addition, there were a further 545 asylum appeals outstanding at the immigration appeals tribunal. A regional breakdown of these data is not centrally recorded.

Information on the number of asylum-related judicial reviews awaiting a decision, or on the number of persons awaiting departure or deportation is not available.

Police Bill

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on further amendments to part III of the Police Bill *[Lords]*. [15476]

Mr. Howard: Contradictory amendments to part III of the Police Bill were passed in another place. The Government do not believe that either of these amendments is acceptable as it stands. Further amendment is therefore essential.

I have considered carefully the points raised during the debate. There are two key principles that I believe must be maintained. First, the authorisation of intrusive operations should remain the responsibility of chief officers. There should be effective external scrutiny of those decisions but they should not be the subject of second guessing. Secondly, chief officers must remain fully accountable for their decisions and remain liable to answer in court as to why they have authorised these operations. They should also be answerable for any complaint arising from the authorisation of an operation and be liable to be named in the annual report of the commissioner for any wrongly authorised operation.

Accordingly, I shall table amendments which will provide:

that responsibility for authorising operations should be that of the chief officer;

that the prior approval of a commissioner will be required where there are reasonable grounds for thinking that the operation could affect legal, medical or journalistic privilege or where the operation involves intrusion into residential dwellings, offices and hotel bedrooms. Prior approval would not be necessary where the chief officer was acting with the consent of the person able to give permission in respect of the relevant premises or in urgent cases;

that the commissioner will approve an authorisation if he is satisfied there are reasonable grounds for believing that the action is likely to be of substantial value in the prevention or detection of serious crime and that what the action seeks to achieve could not reasonably be achieved by other means;

a right of appeal to the chief commissioner against a decision taken by the commissioner;

for commissioners to serve for a fixed period of three years, and for their removal from office within that period to require the consent of both Houses.

HEALTH

GP Fundholders

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amounts retained by GP fundholders by health authority at the end of each financial year since the introduction of GP fundholding. [13651]

Mr. Malone: Information about efficiency savings made by general practitioner fundholders for 1995–96 is not yet available. Figures for 1994–95 are given in the table. For years prior to 1994–95, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 16 March 1995, *Official Report* column *704*. GP fundholder savings are available to be reinvested for the benefit of patients in accordance with regulations.

Amount of fundholder savings in 1994–95 by family health services authority

FHSA name	*Amount of retained savings (£000)*
Cleveland	939
Cumbria	902
Durham	1,458
Northumberland	1,170
Gateshead	194
Newcastle	322
North Tyneside	231
South Tyneside	579
Sunderland	217
Humberside	2,113
North Yorkshire	2,476
Bradford	1,335
Calderdale	183
Kirklees	758
Leeds	1,728
Wakefield	1,198
Derbyshire	2,730
Leicestershire	1,395
Lincolnshire	2,435
Nottinghamshire	1,269
Barnsley	309
Doncaster	337
Rotherham	887
Sheffield	1,497
Cambridgeshire	577
Norfolk	875
Suffolk	756
Bedfordshire	752
Berkshire	2,215
Buckinghamshire	2,090
Northamptonshire	484
Oxfordshire	1,515
Hertfordshire	3,072
Barnet	537
Brent and Harrow	827
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	114
Hillingdon	163
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	738
Essex	1,437
Barking and Havering	289
Camden and Islington	17
City and East London	208
Enfield and Haringey	199
Redbridge and Waltham	296
East Sussex	447
Kent	1,981
Greenwich and Bexley	1,630
Bromley	151
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	948
Surrey	1,380
West Sussex	800
Croydon	319
Kingston and Richmond	1,176
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	1,725
Dorset	470
Hampshire	2,038
Wiltshire	1,318
Isle of Wight	275
Avon	1,458
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	720
Devon	2,037
Gloucestershire	822
Somerset	520
Hereford and Worcestershire	3,921
Shropshire	1,033
Staffordshire	0
Warwickshire	1,130
Birmingham	3,610
Coventry	1,236
Dudley	605

Amount of fundholder savings in 1994–95 by family health services authority

FHSA name	*Amount of retained savings (£000)*
Sandwell	894
Solihull	601
Walsall	512
Wolverhampton	434
Cheshire	1,218
Liverpool	441
St. Helen's and Knowsley	542
Sefton	592
Wirral	102
Lancashire	1,931
Bolton	367
Bury	334
Manchester	666
Oldham	295
Rochdale	260
Salford	372
Stockport	799
Tameside	166
Trafford	37
Wigan	403

Source:
NHS Executive regional offices.

VAT (Incontinence Products)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement in respect of the implications for the North Staffordshire Combined Health Care Trust of costs incurred in the event of the VAT tribunal ruling that VAT be applied to incontinence products. [14334]

Mr. Burns: The outcome of the tribunal will have no impact on the requirement on trusts to pay value added tax on incontinence products supplied to the national health service.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14468]

Mr. Horam: There is one full-time and one part-time member of staff who are employed solely to provide advice on equal opportunities in the Department of Health. In addition, a small proportion of their manager's time, other personnel officers' time and some administrative support are devoted to this responsibility.

Asthma

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each regional health authority the number of hospital admissions for asthma for each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement. [14887]

Mr. Horam: The table gives information on hospital admissions with a primary diagnosis of asthma from 1989–90 to 1994–95—respectively the earliest and most recent years for which figures are available.

Hospital admissions for asthma

	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95
Northern	4,750	5,551	6,422	6,085	6,375	5,630
Yorkshire	6,355	7,257	5,585	6,881	7,852	5,875
Trent	7,865	8,167	8,557	8,088	8,358	7,823
East Anglian	2,904	2,817	3,019	2,560	3,393	3,884
North West Thames	8,560	6,960	7,732	7,975	6,776	6,168
North East Thames	8,437	7,603	7,676	7,468	7,357	6,316
South East Thames	7,533	7,343	8,292	7,208	7,100	6,739
South West Thames	4,349	4,416	3,630	4,872	5,651	5,064
Wessex	4,199	3,955	4,776	4,225	4,739	4,344
Oxford	5,445	3,856	4,302	4,178	4,502	5,210
South Western	5,345	4,542	5,224	4,898	5,162	4,653
West Midlands	9,084	10,087	10,412	10,581	11,396	9,956
Mersey	4,950	4,697	5,608	5,695	6,408	5,038
North Western	9,895	9,618	10,850	10,186	11,089	10,165

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently being treated for asthma *(a)* in each county and *(b)* in total; and if he will make a statement. [14886]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Orthodontists

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many orthodontists per 100,000 population there are in each country of the European Union. [14692]

Mr. Malone: There are no figures available on the numbers of orthodontists as there is no accepted European Union definition of an orthodontist.

Community Care

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the working of the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996; and if he will make a statement. [14901]

Mr. Burns: The Government intend to bring the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 into force on 1 April 1997. The implementation of the Act will be monitored as part of the Department's general monitoring of community care.

Read Codes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the coding system used to store clinical information, known as the Read codes, from *(a)* NHS consultants and *(b)* the National Audit Office. [14768]

Mr. Horam: The Read codes are maintained and developed by the national health service centre for coding and classification (NHS CCC) which is part of the information management group of the NHS executive. The NHS CCC is a regular contact with approximately 700 NHS consultants through its various working groups and advisory panels.

Hospital consultants are represented by the joint consultants committee, the British Medical Association and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and their faculties in the United Kingdom.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has received no recent communication from the JCC on the subject of the Read codes. The only previous communication was on 15 June 1994 in which the JCC was

"pleased to support the continued development and use of coded Read terms as the preferred clinical dictionary to underpin all clinical systems and electronic communications in NHS".

Copies of this letter will be placed in the Library.

The National Audit Office is currently conducting an investigation concerning the Read codes. Its investigation is not yet complete and its report is awaited.

Policy Initiatives (Funding)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to which policy initiative he has devoted most funding in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement on progress with each such initiatives. [15083]

Mr. Horam: Information on policies and expenditure is not available in the form requested. Details of expenditure across the full range of the Department of Health's policies are published annually in its departmental report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Hospital Patients (Visits)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* carried out and *(b)* commissioned into (i) the impact of visits by friends and relatives on the length of time taken by hospitals patients to recover and (ii) the relationship between distance from home to hospital and the number of visits by friends and relatives. [15097]

Mr. Horam: No such research has been commissioned or carried out by the Department of Health.

Osteoporosis

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures are being taken to encourage GPs and health authorities to make greater use of bone density measurements in those cases where an individual is identified as being at high risk of developing osteoporosis; and if he will make a statement; [15004]

(2) what guidance he *(a)* has issued and *(b)* plans to issue to health authorities to improve the co-ordination and delivery of services for the treatment and prevention of osteoporosis; and if he will make a statement. [15006]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health published a report of the advisory group on osteoporosis in January 1995, and circulated it widely to the national health service. It is for local health authorities to decide what priority to give to making bone density measurement available to those who need it, and how best to co-ordinate services to meet local needs. The White Paper "The National Health Service—a Service with Ambitions", sets out a framework for the continued development of better co-ordinated and integrated services. We have no plans to issue specific guidance on osteoporosis services. Copies of the report of the advisory group on osteoporosis and of the White Paper are available in the Library.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which the lifestyle measures contained in the "The Health of the Nation" to reduce the risk of coronary disease and cancer are applicable to the prevention of osteoporosis; and if he will make a statement. [15005]

Mr. Horam: The "Health of the Nation" strategy identified five key areas in which substantial improvements in health can be achieved, and set objectives and targets in each. Implementation of the strategy includes promoting certain lifestyle measures which can help individuals improve their own health. These measures include taking regular physical activity, eating healthily, sensible alcohol consumption and giving up smoking, all of which have a beneficial effect on bone health, and can help prevent osteoporosis.

Dental Access Fund

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the take-up by *(a)* dentists and *(b)* health authorities of the dental access fund; and if he will make a statement. [15070]

Mr. Malone: Seventy health authorities applied for grants from the dental access fund, and 22 received awards.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of North Yorkshire social services department's projected budgetary reduction on its ability to meet its statutory duties to disabled people; what monitoring he will be conducting in this respect; and if he will make a statement. [14076]

Mr. Burns: The total resources provided for social services in North Yorkshire will increase by a further 6 per cent. next year to £73 million, 48 per cent. more in real terms than in 1990–91. It is for local authorities to manage and to decide on the allocation of these substantial resources in accordance with local circumstances and their own priorities.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local social services authorities are planning to withdraw services from disabled people in consequence of reductions in their budgets for 1997–98; what monitoring he is conducting of the effect of budgetary cuts on the ability of authorities to meet their statutory duties to disabled people; and if he will make a statement. [14079]

Mr. Burns: The total resources provided for social services in England will increase by a further 4 per cent. next year to £7.7 billion—73 per cent. more in real terms than in 1990–91. It is for local authorities to manage and to decide on the allocation of these substantial resources in accordance with local circumstances and their own priorities.

The Department receives budget figures for individual local authorities by broad client category, and these are published in "Key Indicators of Local Authority Social Services", copies of which are available in the Library. The Department does not, however, obtain comparable statistics on planned activity levels, so is not in a position to analyse prospectively whether it is proposed to reduce services.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to meet the Association of Directors of Social Services to discuss the effects of planned budgetary reductions on the ability of local social services authorities to meet their statutory duties to disabled people. [14080]

Mr. Burns: We have no immediate plans to meet the Association of Directors of Social Services, though we do meet regularly to discuss a range of issues. We last met it informally, on 4 February.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of Kent social services department's projected budgetary reduction on its ability to meet its statutory duties to disabled people; what monitoring he will be conducting in this respect; and if he will make a statement. [14081]

Mr. Burns: The total resources provided for social services in Kent will increase by a further 5 per cent. next year to £218 million—84 per cent. more in real terms than in 1990–91. It is for local authorities to manage and to decide on the allocation of these substantial resources in accordance with local circumstances and their own priorities.

Care Plans

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what directions he has *(a)* issued and *(b)* proposes to issue to local authorities on the conduct of assessments and preparation of care plans arising from the judgment in the case of R v. London borough of Islington ex parte Rixon; what monitoring his Department has carried out of existing local practice; if all local authorities now act in accordance with the judgment; and if he will make a statement. [14665]

Mr. Burns: The Department has issued both policy and practice guidance on assessment and care plans to local authorities, and we do not see any need for additional guidance, or directions, arising from this judgment. We expect local authorities to take account of this guidance, and, of course, to comply with the law. Assessment and

care planning are monitored as part of our general monitoring of community care, on which there have been a number of inspections and studies since 1993.

Residential Care (Coventry)

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will meet representatives of private residential home proprietors in the Coventry area. [15358]

Mr. Burns: A meeting with representatives of private residential home proprietors from the Coventry area will be considered if they write setting out their concerns.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will examine the procedures under which the proprietors of residential homes in Coventry receive their allocation of clients. [15359]

Mr. Burns: We have issued a direction to local authorities which requires them to place residents in a care home of the resident's choice subject to certain criteria—for example, cost, and suitability—being met.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will conduct an investigation into the causes of bed blocking in Coventry health authority hospitals by elderly patients assessed as requiring residential or nursing home care. [15360]

Mr. Burns: The national health service executive routinely monitors information on the reasons for delayed hospital discharges. In addition, a joint review of personal social services within the Coventry area will be undertaken by the social services inspectorate and the Audit Commission within the next year.

We are aware that there have been some delays in discharging patients within Coventry health authority over recent weeks and that there are a number of patients in Walsgrave hospital awaiting residential and nursing home placements. It is expected that these placements will take place soon.

Coventry health authority, together with the Walsgrave Hospitals NHS trust and Coventry social services have been working to resolve these problems. They have, for example, put together a pilot scheme, which commenced on 5 February to provide a "halfway house" for some patients who are fit for discharge.

My hon. Friend may wish to contact Ms Caroline Andrew, chairman of Coventry health authority, for further details.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will conduct a survey of the weekly costs of residential care provision in *(a)* the non-profit and *(b)* the for-profit sectors in Coventry. [15361]

Mr. Burns: Information on the weekly costs of residential care in local authority and independent staffed homes for older people for 1994–95 can be found in table U1 of "Key Indicators of local authority social services 1996", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will conduct a survey into the number of beds available in residential homes and nursing homes in *(a)* the for-profit and *(b)* non-profit sectors in Coventry. [15362]

Mr. Burns: The latest information is published in "Residential Accommodation Statistics 1996", which is summarised in the table.

Residential and nursing beds in Coventry, at 31 March 1996

	Registered beds
Local authority homes	490
Residential homes	
Voluntary sector	160
Private sector	1,280
Nursing homes[1]	570

Source:
Department of Health annual statistical returns RAC5, K036.
Note:
[1] The nursing home data collected by the Department of Health do not distinguish between the private and voluntary sectors. Data held on the Laing and Buisson Care Homes Information database however suggests that approximately half of the registered beds are in the voluntary sector and half in the private sector.

GP Fundholder Budgets (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms (i) the final cash limit for general practice fundholder budgets in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes in 1992–93, (ii) the initial cash limit for such budgets in 1996–97 and (iii) the sums of public money planned to be available for GP fundholder budgets in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and for Buckinghamshire health authority in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [14294]

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* Information about planned general practice fundholder budgets in Buckinghamshire for 1997–98 is not available. Figures for 1992–93 and 1996–97 are in the table. The figures are not comparable because, for example, of the expansion of services in the fundholding scheme and the incorporation of management allowances within the fund. For these reasons, a real terms comparison is not meaningful.

GP fundholder budgets in Buckinghamshire (cash)

Year	*GP fundholder budgets (£ million)*	*Number of GP fundholders*
1992–93	[1]17.0	99
1996–97	87.9	265

[1] Excludes staff element of budget, for which 1992–93 information is not available.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of non-fatal food poisoning there were in each year since 1990; and what was the source by category of the infections. [14671]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* Information on food poisoning does not distinguish between fatal and non-fatal cases. Details of the total number of cases of food poisoning notified under the Public Health (Infectious Disease) Regulations 1988 to the Office for National Statistics up to 1994 are published in "Series MB2 Communicable Disease Statistics" and

copies are available in the Library. There were 82,041 cases notified in 1995, the latest provision figure for 1996 is 83,664.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 24 January, *Official Report*, column *767* on the information on deaths which was derived from deaths registrations and is therefore not comparable with this information. The two sets of information come from different sources and are collected on a different basis. It is not possible to subtract the number of deaths from the number of cases to arrive at a figure for non-fatal cases.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *767*, if he will list the source of each fatal food poisoning outbreak for each year since 1990. [14704]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer Friday 7 February 1997]:* Information on source of infection for general outbreaks is available from 1992—the earliest date information is available—onwards and is given in the table:

General outbreaks of foodborne infectious intestinal disease where associated deaths have been reported

England and Wales 1992–[1]1996

Year	*Organism*	*Food*	*Number of Deaths*
1992	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	poached eggs	1
	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	trifle, vanilla slices	1
	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	chicken nuggets, cheese on toast	1
	Salmonella typhimurium DT104	cooked ham	2
	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	not known	3
1993	Clostridium perfringens	roast turkey	1
	Clostridium perfringens	carrots, fish	1
	Salmonella typhimurium DT104c	cooked chicken, ham sandwiches	1
	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	egg custard	1
1994	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	chicken chow mein	1
1995	Salmonella enteritidis PT5A	sausage rolls, corned beef sandwiches	2
	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	boiled eggs	1
	Escherichia coli 0157	pre-cooked meats	2
	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	strawberry mousse	2
	Clostridium perfringens	roast lamb	2
1996	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	raw shell eggs	1
	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	soft boiled eggs	2
	Salmonella indiana	chicken breast pieces	10
	Escherichia coli 0157	pork products	1
	Salmonella enteritidis PT4	mayonnaise made with raw shell eggs	1

Source:

Public Health Laboratory Service.

Notes:

[1] Provisional data.

General outbreak: an outbreak affecting members of more than 1 private residence or residents of an institution.

Most food poisoning deaths are isolated incidents and do not occur as part of a general outbreak.

Drinking Water

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his Department's proposals in respect of requirements relating to oestrogen levels in drinking water. [14577]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of the Environment has funded research into substances possessing oestrogenic activity in sewage effluents and their significance in water sources and drinking water supply reservoirs. This research, which has been published, showed that although oestrogenic activity could be detected in fish in sewage effluent this activity declined rapidly in water courses and could not be detected in fish kept in water abstracted for treatment as drinking water.

A recent study funded by the Environment Agency indicated that oestrogens derived from man may be responsible for the oestrogenic activity of sewage effluent. To provide further reassurance, the Department is now funding developing of highly sensitive methods for analysis of these human derived oestrogens in water sources and drinking water. The methods developed will be used to carry out further investigations of oestrogen concentrations and to quantify removal in water treatment processes.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Anglo-Irish Secretariat (Briefings)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by date and subject the briefings and presentations given by the Northern Ireland civil service to the Anglo-Irish secretariat in 1996. [11700]

Mr. Ancram: Briefing and presentations which were given to the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish secretariat by representatives of the Northern Ireland Office and/or Northern Ireland Departments in 1996 are as follows:

1996	*Briefings and presentations*
30 January	Cultural matters
6 February	Economic and social matters
22 February	Relations between the security forces and the community
21 March	Relations between the security forces and the community
26 March	Health services
22 April	Public order
30 April	Relations between the police and the community
2 May	Composition of public bodies
8 May	Economic and social matters
15 May	Cultural matters
16 May	Economic and social matters
26 June	Public order
24 July	Public order
31 July	Economic and social matters
7 August	Public order
29 August	Public order
4 September	Public order
3 October	Housing
17 October	Economic, social and cultural matters
18 October	Political mattes
14 November	Relations between the security forces and the community

1996	Briefings and presentations
14 November	Composition of public bodies
28 November	Prisons policy
5 December	Relations between the security forces and the community
10 December	Public expenditure

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment his Department has made of the reasons behind the recent outbreaks of Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [13608]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* An outbreak of Newcastle disease was confirmed on 7 February 1997 in a broiler production unit near Lurgan, Co. Armagh.

Epidemiological investigation is currently under way in an attempt to establish the source of the outbreak.

The last outbreak of Newcastle disease in Northern Ireland occurred in August 1996, involved one flock and was most likely due to wild birds gaining access to the poultry house.

Early Release (Spiritual Conversion)

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the case of how many life sentence prisoners who have received early release in the past 10 years the decisions were influenced in part by the prisoner's spiritual conversion. [14347]

Sir John Wheeler: This specific information is not centrally held and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I should point out that the fact that a prisoner had undergone a spiritual conversion would not in itself warrant early release.

Irish Medium Teaching Courses

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Irish medium postgraduate certificate of education courses and stage one of the Irish medium B.Ed. course have been accredited by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland and validated by the Queen's university of Belfast. [14483]

Mr. Ancram: The courses have been validated by the Queen's university of Belfast. They do not require accreditation by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the expenditure to date on the development of the new Irish language medium B.Ed. and postgraduate certificate of education courses at St. Mary's college, Belfast; and if he will make a statement. [14412]

Mr. Ancram: A total of £44,586. The courses are being developed to meet the needs of Irish medium schools.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the six stage one modules of the new Irish medium B.Ed. courses at St. Mary's college, Belfast, have been specially designed for Irish medium teaching; and what percentage of each module is taught through the medium of Irish. [14411]

Mr. Ancram: All six. The percentages are:

Two main subject modules: 100 per cent.

Two curriculum studies modules: 0 to 100 per cent. depending on the subject

Two education studies modules: 5 per cent.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who is the director responsible for developing Irish language medium B.Ed. and postgraduate certificate of education courses at St. Mary's college, Belfast; and what advisory and consultative structures are in place involving Irish medium schools and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland in the development of these courses. [14423]

Mr. Ancram: The college principal. The college has responsibility for developing both courses in consultation with Irish medium schools, other interest groups and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the new Irish-medium postgraduate certificate of education courses at St. Mary's college, Belfast, have been specially designed for Irish medium teaching; and what percentage of the whole course is taught through the medium of Irish. [14413]

Mr. Ancram: The answer is all, and approximately 20 per cent.

Job Creation (Belfast, West)

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many jobs have been created in the constituency of Belfast, West, *(a)* since 10 April 1992 and *(b)* between 10 June 1983 and 10 April 1992. [14358]

Mr. Ancram: Information on total jobs created is not available, but net job creation is demonstrated by the change in the number of employees in employment. Employment statistics at parliamentary constituency are available only from the Northern Ireland census of employment, which is currently conducted in September every second year. Information for the dates closest to those requested is as follows:

Employees in employment[1, 2] in Belfast West parliamentary constituency area

	Number	Net change in total employees
(a)		
1991	51,567	+3,773 (+7.3 per cent.)
1995	55,340	+3,773 (+7.3 per cent.)
(b)		
1984	46,784	+4,783 (+10.2 per cent.)
1991	51,567	+4,783 (+10.2 per cent.)

[1] Figures exclude agriculture and self-employed.
[2] All figures are at September of each year.

Inward Investment (Belfast, West)

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what incentives for attracting inward investment towards the consistency of Belfast, West his

Department has *(a)* considered and *(b)* approved (i) since 10 April 1992 and (ii) between 10 June 1983 and 10 April 1992. [14360]

Mr. Ancram: Between 10 April 1992 and 31 December 1996 the Industrial Development Board constructed four factories and acquired or was in the process of acquiring 36.5 acres of land at a total cost of £6.4 million in the Belfast, West constituency. During this period IDB offered financial assistance totalling some £54 million towards total investment of almost £150 million for 15 inward investment projects promising 1,642 new jobs and safeguarding 1,368 more.

Between January 1983 and April 1992 three factories were built and 11.5 acres acquired in the constituency at a total cost of £2.6 million. Between 1986–87—the earliest year for which equivalent figures are available—and April 1992 IDB offered support totalling £29 million against investment of almost £104 million by 13 inward investment projects, promoting 202 new jobs and safeguarding 1,826 more.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many visits by overseas investors and trade delegations his Department records as having taken place in the Belfast, West constituency *(a)* since 10 April 1992 and *(b)* between 10 June 1993 and 10 April 1992. [14362]

Mr. Ancram: The number of visits by overseas investors—interpreted to mean potential investors—is not available for the period 10 June 1983 to 31 March 1993 and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Between 1 April 1993 and 31 December 1996 the Industrial Development Board recorded 127 visits by potential investors to the Belfast, West constituency.

Since 10 April 1992 there have been five trade delegation visits to the Belfast, West constituency. Between 10 June 1983 and 10 April 1992 there was one such visit.

Departmental Decisions (Judicial Review)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many decisions by his Department were challenged through judicial review in Session 1995–96; and in how many cases *(a)* the Department's decision was upheld by the court, *(b)* the court found for the applicant, *(c)* the Department submitted to the judgment and *(d)* the Department appealed successfully against the judicial review decision. [14373]

Sir John Wheeler: This information is not readily available in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments as no central record is kept of applications for judicial reviews.

Inner-city Action (Belfast, West)

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what amount of funding from Government inner-city action programmes was released to community and voluntary organisations in the Belfast, West constituency between 10 June 1983 and 10 April 1992. [14357]

Sir John Wheeler: Information about expenditure on inner-city action programmes was not available on a ward by ward basis before 31 March 1994. However, details of projects funded under the making Belfast work initiative since its inception in 1988 to the 31 March 1992 were published in the making Belfast work strategy proposals published in April 1994. A copy of this document is in the Library.

Expenditure by Belfast action teams covering the Belfast, West constituency amounted to £3.4 million up to 31 March 1992.

Between 1983 and 1986 the Northern Ireland Office and Department of Health and Social Services provided £286,000 towards a diversionary scheme which targeted hard core joyriders in west Belfast.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding from the Belfast action teams and making Belfast work programmes has been released to community and voluntary organisations in the Belfast, West constituency since 10 April 1992. [14361]

Mr. Ancram: Information about making Belfast work and Belfast action team expenditure on a ward basis was not available before April 1994, although details of the individual projects which received funding between April 1992 and 31 March 1994 is available. However, it is not possible to aggregate this information into constituency areas because projects often covered more than one ward.

From 1 April 1994 approximately £35 million has been allocated by making Belfast work and Belfast action team to projects within the constituency of Belfast, West.

Investment (Belfast, West)

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what level of *(a)* public and *(b)* private investment has been secured for the constituency of Belfast, West (i) since 10 April 1992 and (ii) between 10 June 1983 and 10 April 1992. [14359]

Mr. Ancram: From the information available, it is estimated that since financial year 1992–93 direct departmental public investment commitments in the Belfast, West constituency are £406 million, and related private sector investment is £162 million.

Corresponding figures for the period 1983–84 to 1991–92 are not entirely complete as expenditure on a number of Government programmes is not available for the entire period. Available figures indicate direct departmental public investment commitments were £172 million and related private sector investment was £112 million.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14469]

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland civil service has sought to integrate equal opportunities advice and good practice into all its personnel arrangements both in terms of day to day personnel and in strategic, policy terms. It is not, therefore, possible to isolate either the

costs or numbers of staff employed in Departments to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities policies.

Muckamore Abbey Hospital

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on *(a)* the future of Muckamore Abbey hospital and *(b)* health care provision for patients currently served by the hospital; and what consultations he has initiated with groups representing patient interests on this subject. [14705]

Mr. Ancram: The future of Muckamore Abbey hospital is a matter primarily for the Eastern health and social services board, the principal purchaser of its services. The board has consulted widely on this issue holding 19 public meetings. It also met a deputation from the parents and friends of Muckamore Abbey hospital. The board has indicated that the hospital is well placed to continue to provide in-patient specialist treatment services for people with a learning disability and is discussing with the North and West Belfast Trust, which manages the hospital, how this might best be achieved.

Meanwhile, the process is continuing of resettling to the community those patients who no longer have a requirement for in-patient treatment and care. The resettlement of individual patients from the hospital is carefully planned and implemented in order to ensure that their continuing health needs are assessed and met.

EU Agriculture Funding

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money Northern Ireland has received in each financial year to date from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund guidance section; what proportion of these receipts were paid to the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector; and what proportion of these receipts (i) represented a cash addition to the Northern Ireland economy and (ii) was used to offset Government expenditure on Northern Ireland in each year for which figures are available. [10831]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 13 January 1997]:* Receipts earned by the private sector and by non-central Government public sector bodies are paid in full to the claimant. These receipts are cash additions to the claimants. Receipts earned by central Government contribute to the total of public expenditure in Northern Ireland and allow that total to be maintained at a higher level than would otherwise be feasible.

Northern Ireland contributes a share of the United Kingdom's payments to the European Community, but these are not hypothecated to specific funds. It is not possible therefore to identify the extent to which receipts from the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund represent net cash additions to the Northern Ireland economy.

All EAGGF receipts are subject to EC audit arrangements and normal Government accounting requirements.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14472]

Mr. Burt: There are currently 15 staff employed exclusively to advise on the application of equal opportunities at an annual cost of approximately £341,000. In addition, there are a number of staff who provide such advice as part of their wider duties, for example line mangers, personnel officers, local equal opportunity officers and harassment advisers. Information on the number of such people is not held centrally.

Benefits Agency

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State of Social Security what is the breakdown by age of callers to Benefits Agency offices. [14580]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Housing Benefit (Domestic Violence)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the contents of the further representations he has received from Welsh Women's Aid in relation to the guidelines to local authorities with respect to housing benefit entitlement for women leaving home because of the threat of domestic violence; and if he will make a statement. [13844]

Mr. Roger Evans: No further representations have been received from Welsh Women's Aid since its letter of 24 October 1996 to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, departmental officials have exchanged correspondence with Welsh Women's Aid. I am advised that the proposed revised guidance accurately reflects current regulations.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants have been refused housing benefit and council tax benefit following the introduction of the habitual residence test for the 1995–96 financial year. [15218]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available. However, the figures are currently being processed and will be published in the "Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Summary Statistics—Update Number 2" in March 1997.

A copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the costs to local authorities of administering the habitual residence test in respect of housing benefit and council tax benefit claims. [15219]

Mr. Evans: The estimated cost to local authorities of administering the habitual residence test in respect of housing benefit and council tax benefit claims for 1995–96 is £0.7 million.

Disabled People (Income Support)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disabled people were receiving income support in May 1992; and what change there has been in the number in each subsequent year. [14077]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested as there is no specific information available on the number of people with disabilities who receive income support.

However, information on the number of people who receive the disability or higher pensioner premium, other than those who qualify because they are aged 80 or over, as part of their income support, is in the table.

Date	*Income support claimants in receipt of the disability premium*	*Income support claimants aged 60–79 in receipt of the higher pensioner premium*	*Total*
May 1992	425,000	190,000	614,000
May 1993	527,000	249,000	776,000
May 1994	618,000	296,000	914,000
May 1995	739,000	342,000	1,081,000
February 1996	769,000	374,000	1,143,000

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand and totals may not sum.
2. Sample size is 5 per cent.
3. The disability premium is awarded to those people aged under 60 who receive disability living allowance, attendance allowance, severe disablement allowance, or long-term incapacity benefit. The premium is also paid to people who have been incapable of work for at least 364 days.
4. The higher pensioner premium is awarded to those people aged between 60 and 79 who receive disability living allowance, attendance allowance, severe disablement allowance, or long-term incapacity benefit. The premium is also paid to people who were in receipt of the disability premium within eight weeks of their 60th birthday, and have been in receipt of income support continuously since then.

All Work Test

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the all work test for incapacity benefit; what communication he has had with doctors about complaints from disabled people concerning the test; what plans he has for changes to the test; and if he will make a statement. [14078]

Mr. Burt: A number of representations from hon. Members and the public about matters relating to the all work test for incapacity benefit have been received. In addition departmental officials maintain regular contact with professional bodies representing general practitioners.

The number of complaints from people claiming incapacity benefit who are required to undergo a medical examination represents less than 1 per cent. of claimants examined. The Benefits Agency medical services have well-publicised procedures in place to investigate complaints speedily and to give the complainant a full response.

We are continuing to monitor the operation of the test to ensure that it is meeting its objective of targeting the benefit on those medically incapable of work. We have recently introduced some minor amendments to the regulations which will improve its application and assist consistency in decision making.

Benefits in Kind

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list, for each of the last seven years, the extensions of the application of employers' national insurance contributions to benefits in kind designed to eliminate the avoidance of national insurance contributions on bonuses and other one-off benefits in kind; if he will give his estimate of the savings accruing from each measure; and if he will make a statement. [13332]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The measures introduced in December 1996 to prevent national insurance contribution—NIC—avoidance by paying employees in their own company's shares and share options were announced in my written answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *715–16*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith).

The following measures to combat NIC avoidance were introduced prior to December 1996.

In 1991 payments by way of a wide range of financial instruments such as shares, other than own company shares, gilts and insurance policies became subject to NICs.

In 1993 payments by way of commodities capable of being sold on a recognised investment exchange or the London bullion market such as precious metals and gold bullion and vouchers for these commodities became subject to NICs.

In 1994 payments by way of alcoholic liquors on which no UK duty had been paid, gemstones and any vouchers for these assets became subject to NICs.

In 1995 payment by way of assets for which trading arrangements exist, vouchers for those assets and vouchers which are themselves the subject of trading arrangements became subject to NICs.

Employers are not required to identify bonuses or other one-off payments. The behavioural effects of measures against NICs avoidance, particularly those aimed at a wide range of asset-based avoidance, make precise long-term estimates of savings unreliable.

The Inland Revenue estimates, in respect of the changes made in December 1996 specifically related to own-company shares, that the annual savings would amount to about £30 million.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14552]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* There have been no instances of the Department's computer systems being illegally accessed by computer hackers.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14553]

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The information is in the table. There have been no recorded cases of computer hacking into the Department's systems.

Calendar year	*Fraud*	*Theft*	*Thefts involving chips*
1996	15	222	65
1995	34	247	65
1994	32	143	1
1993	41	79	2
1992	17	33	0

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the targets used by the Benefits Agency medical services in respect of *(a)* medical advice, *(b)* scrutiny, *(c)* assessment, *(d)* examination and *(e)* complaints for each of the disability benefits. [14404]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 10 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the targets used by the Benefits Agency Medical Service in respect of (a) medical advice, (b) scrutiny, (c) assessment, (d) examination and (e) complaints for each of the disability benefits.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is shown in the enclosed tables. All targets are expressed in working days.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Incapacity benefit targets

	Target
Medical advice	95 per cent. cleared in 5 days
Scrutiny	30 per cent. cleared in 10 days 85 per cent cleared in 50 days
Assessment	30 per cent. cleared in 10 days 85 per cent cleared in 50 days
Examinations	30 per cent cleared in 10 days 85 per cent. cleared in 50 days
Complaints	100 per cent. acknowledged in 2 days 100 per cent. to receive full or interim response in 10 days 80 per cent. cleared in 20 days

Industrial injuries disablement benefit targets

	Target
Medical advice	60 per cent. cleared in 33 days 90 per cent. cleared in 70 days
Scrutiny	60 per cent. cleared in 33 days 90 per cent. cleared in 70 days
Assessment	60 per cent. cleared in 33 days 90 per cent. cleared in 70 days
Examinations	60 per cent. cleared in 33 days 90 per cent. cleared in 70 days
Complaints	100 per cent. acknowledged in 2 days 100 per cent. to receive full or interim response in 10 days 80 per cent. cleared in 20 days.

Severe disablement allowance targets

	Target
Medical advice	Not applicable
Scrutiny	Not applicable
Assessment	60 per cent. cleared in 40 days 85 per cent. cleared in 100 days
Examinations	60 per cent. cleared in 40 days 85 per cent. cleared in 100 days
Complaints	100 per cent. acknowledged in 2 days 100 per cent. to receive full or interim response in 10 days 80 per cent. cleared in 20 days

Disability Living Allowance/Attendance Allowance Targets

Each Medical Services Centre has a Service Level Agreement with the local Disability Benefit Centre. Targets are negotiated and agreed to take account of local circumstances.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the main elements in the running costs of the Benefits Agency medical services in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [14405]

(2) if he will list the component parts of the Benefits Agency medical services and medical evidence budgets and the proportions of the local social security budget they represent; [14406]

(3) what has been the level of spending in the current year to date on the *(a)* Benefits Agency medical services and *(b)* medical evidence budgets relative to the planned provision. [14407]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 10 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the main elements in the running costs of the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS) in (a) 1995–96 and (b) 1996–97; if he will list the component parts of the BAMS and Medical Evidence budgets and the proportions of the local social security budget they represent; and what has been the level of spending in the current year to date on the (a) BAMS and (b) Medical Evidence budgets relative to the planned provision.

The main elements in the running costs of the BAMS for each year are staffing and medical evidence.

The BAMS budget consists of Salaries and Non-staff Costs. The Medical Evidence Budget consists of Doctors Fees and expenses, Medical Report Fees, Customer Expenses, and Medical Examination Incidentals.

For 1996–97, the BAMS budget is 4.8% of the budget allocated to the Area Directorates, and the Medical evidence budget is 4.0%.

The actual and planned expenditure for April to December 1996 is shown in the table below:-

	Actual expenditure £	*Planned expenditure* £
BAMS	44,111,000	43,812,000
Medical evidence	39,064,275	35,594,035

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefit Payment Security Cards

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what representations he received from *(a)* Post Office Counters and *(b)* trades unions representing Post Office and Benefits Agency staff concerning the introduction of the benefit payment security cards; and if he will place copies of such representations in the Library; [14795]

(2) for what reasons he introduced the payment security card for certain categories of benefit claimants; in what parts of the United Kingdom the cards were issued; what was the cost of introducing the cards; what assessment he has made of the extent to which the cards assisted in reducing benefit fraud; for what reasons payment security cards are no longer acceptable as valid proof of identity when cashing benefit cheques; and if he will make a statement. [14794]

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mrs. Ann Clwyd, dated 11 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the Payment Security Card.

In response to Question 14794, the Payment Security Card was introduced by the Employment Service for unemployed clients who lived in areas which experienced significant girocheque losses. It was introduced as a security precaution to reduce the amount of girocheque fraud and the number of girocheques reported as not received. The card was originally piloted in the West Midlands region in September 1993 and a decision was made to extend its use in July 1995. The cards were issued in 272 Jobcentres located throughout the country. Please see Annex 1 for a list of those Jobcentres. The cost of introducing the card was £225,000 including the manufacture and distribution of the cards to Jobcentres and associated publicity material for Jobcentres and Post Offices.

The card was initially successful. An evaluation showed that the number of girocheques reported as not received fell by around 45% and the extent of girocheque fraud fell by 70%. However, the effects of the card diminished over time and some clients experienced difficulties when they lost their cards. The card was in any event intended as a short term measure prior to the planned introduction of the Benefits Agency's Payment Card.

Responsibility for benefit payments to unemployed people transferred to the Benefits Agency in October 1996 with the introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance. For a number of operational and technical reasons, the Payment Security Card could not be included in the Jobseeker's Allowance process. The Benefits Agency's new Payment Card is currently being rolled out to benefit recipients and will eventually include clients receiving Jobseeker's Allowance. This will become the secure means of payment which replaces girocheques altogether. Therefore, no new clients have been issued with a Payment Security Card since the introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance in October 1996. Clients who still held a Payment Security Card were notified in writing during January 1997 that the card would not be accepted by the Post Office from 3 February 1997.

The notification also gave details of the other types of identity which are acceptable to the Post Office when cashing girocheques. Posters have also been displayed in Jobcentres and Post Offices.

In response to Question 14795 representations were received from Trade Unions representing Employment Service staff in November 1993. They asked for details of the terms of reference and timings of the pilot of the Payment Security Card in the West Midlands region. The Trade Union Side were kept informed when it was decided to extend the use of the card in July 1995. The introduction of the Payment Security Card was negotiated with Post Office Counters Ltd. via the Employment Service's contractual partner, Girobank plc. There were no representations to Employment Service from Trade Unions representing Post Office staff. I have made arrangements for copies of the representations made by the Trade Unions representing Employment Service staff to be made available in the House of Commons library

I hope this is helpful.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 February 1997

TRANSPORT

Railcards (Disabled People)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what consultations he has had with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee concerning acceptance of railcards held by disabled people by automatic ticket machines; [15190]

(2) if he will make it his policy to seek to ensure that automatic ticket machines have facilities for accepting railcards held by disabled people. [15191]

Mr. Bowis: The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee has discussed this issue in its rail working group. Representatives of the Department and the Office of the Rail Regulator were present at those discussions.

The Department will be pursuing this with the Office of the Rail Regulator in the context of the Rail Regulator's code of practice on meeting the needs of disabled passengers.

Parking

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the law relating to parking near bus stops. [15351]

Mr. Watts: I have no plans to do so. The Government regard efficient enforcement of the existing law as more likely to improve compliance with waiting restrictions at bus stops than changes to the law.

British Railways Board

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the out-turn of the British Railways Board for 1996–97. [15398]

Mr. Watts: I hope to announce shortly the British Railways Board external finance limit consistent with my latest estimate of its out-turn.

Environmental Impact Directive

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what environmental impact assessment study has been prepared for the Newbury bypass under the provisions of the EC environmental impact directive; what information he has received in respect of the petition made to the European Parliament Petitions Committee concerning the environmental implications of this road project; and if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's monitoring of environmentally based petitions presented to the European Parliament on matters arising in the United Kingdom. [15434]

Mr. Watts: The Government have taken the view consistently that directive 85/337/EEC on environmental impact assessment does not apply to projects such as the Newbury bypass, for which the formal development consent procedure was initiated before the directive came into force on 3 July 1988. In an announcement on 20 October 1995, the European Commission made it clear that it agreed with that view. The bypass scheme was, however, assessed carefully for its environmental effects in accordance with the Department of Transport's manual of environmental appraisal, which was the relevant guidance at the time.

The Government have been informed by the President of the European Parliament about the petition made to the Parliament's Petitions Committee about the bypass.

The Government are not informed routinely by the European Parliament of the content of petitions that it has received. It is for the European Parliament itself to decide how to handle such petitions.

Vehicle Document Fraud

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the subject of reforming the current vehicle licensing and registration system to *(a)* prevent fraud and *(b)* enable (i) stolen vehicles and (ii) owners and drivers to be traced. [15421]

Mr. Bowis: My Department maintains close contacts with representatives of the motor, finance, leasing, insurance and salvage industries and with the police with a view to developing ways in which the vehicle registration system can be better adapted to deter and detect vehicle fraud and other related crime.

Following wide consultation we shall shortly be introducing new arrangements for recording the transfer of vehicles and for the annual notification of unlicensed off-road vehicles. These measures will help to improve the accuracy of the vehicle record and facilitate the tracing of drivers and vehicles for enforcement purposes.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated of foreign initiatives on vehicle title and document fraud; and with what result. [15420]

Mr. Bowis: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency maintains a register of vehicle keepers as opposed to owners because it is the registered keeper with whom the agency and police are normally concerned for law enforcement, revenue collection and road safety purposes.

Accordingly, while the agency maintains close links with a number of foreign registration authorities, it has not commissioned specific research into initiatives on vehicle title and document fraud.

Rail Companies (Profits)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of profits by companies previously owned by British Rail to be paid into public funds in 1996–97. [15403]

Mr. Watts: Up to 11 February 1997, dividends paid into public funds in 1996–97 in respect of the Secretary of State's residual holding of Railtrack shares amounted to £865,335.96.

Railways (Bus Services)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many scheduled railway services were substituted by bus services during the week ended 18 January; for what reasons; and what penalty payments have been made by operators under their agreements with the franchising director. [15350]

Mr. Watts: The information is not available in the form requested. The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising monitors cancellations for franchised services. If an operator cancels more than a set threshold, that is a breach of the franchise agreement and enforcement action may follow. Some operators are also subject to a performance regime with Opraf and are penalised for each cancellation. Bus substitutions as a result of planned engineering work are not usually subject to penalty payments.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of heavy goods vehicles on roads without an operator's licence vehicle disc but operating under the margin arrangement. [15380]

Mr. Bowis: It is impossible to make any accurate estimate of the number of vehicles operated under the margin arrangements. Vehicles used by any licensed operator within their total authorisation limit for up to one calendar month do not need to be specified and thus do not need to carry a disc.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many heavy goods vehicles have been found to be operating without proper authorisation under the Goods Vehicle Operator Licensing Regulations during roadside checks in 1995 and 1996. [15381]

Mr. Bowis: We have no separate figures for heavy goods vehicles found to be operating without a valid operator's licence.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many goods vehicle operators were successfully prosecuted in 1995 and 1996 for operating vehicles without authorisation under the Goods Vehicle Operator Licensing Regulations. [15382]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mr. Andrew Smith, dated 12 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking how many goods vehicle operators have been successfully prosecuted in 1995 and 1996 for operating vehicles without authorisation under the Goods Vehicle Operator Licensing Regulations.

Information about successful prosecutions against vehicle operators for the specific offence of unauthorised use is not currently available. The extent of illegal operations was quantified in a report published in April 1996, of the roadside survey of illegal operators carried out by the Vehicle Inspectorate on behalf of the Department of Transport in October 1995. This indicated that illegal operators accounted for less than 2% of all miles travelled by goods vehicles.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to ensure that the operator licensing details of heavy goods vehicles are ascertained at roadside enforcement checks. [15383]

Mr. Bowis: It is one of a number of checks carried out by traffic examiners at each roadside vehicle check, and is followed up as part of routine enforcement action where necessary.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has completed his consideration of proposals to impound illegally operated and dangerous heavy goods vehicles as indicated in his response to the Transport Committee's Fifth report in November 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15384]

Mr. Bowis: We are still working on plans for a possible scheme for the impounding of illegally operated and dangerous heavy goods vehicles.

DEFENCE

Land Mines

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list each of the supplier companies to his Department for *(a)* anti-personnel mines and *(b)* anti-tank/armoured vehicle mines since 1979; and if he will list the countries to which these companies have exported mines since 1979. [13527]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Available records indicate that the following companies/organisations have, since 1979, met orders from my Department for:

(a) anti-personnel mines: Thorn-EMI, Royal Ordnance, the United States Department of Defence and Alliant Techsystems of the United States;

(b) anti-tank/armoured vehicle mines: Royal Ordnance, Hunting Engineering Ltd. Alliant Techsystems, the MLRS European Production Group, and GIAT Industries and SOFMA of France.

I understand that export licence records before 1991 are not readily available to the Department of Trade and Industry and could be researched only at disproportionate cost. An initial search by DTI of export licence records since 1991 has shown that anti-tank/armoured vehicle mine records are not immediately identifiable and I am advised that the research required to examine the records further could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost. It is clear from earlier research, however, that no mines considered to be anti-personnel mines at the time of export have been exported for over a decade. Records available in my own Department, which may not be definitive, indicate that mines considered at the time of export to fall into one or other of the two categories identified have been exported as follows:

(a) Anti-personnel mines: by Thorn-EMI to Nigeria in 1981;

(b) Anti-tank/armoured vehicle mines: by UK companies to two other countries in 1982 and 1991.

Detailed information on these cannot be provided, since its release would cause harm in terms of one or more of the defence, security, international relations and

commercial confidence exemptions in the code of practice on access to Government information. These were the exemptions in the code referred to in my answer to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) on 23 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *212*.

I am not in a position to provide information regarding exports by non-UK companies.

Copex Internal Security Exhibition

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which company booked the Farnborough site for the Copex—contingency and operational procurement exhibition—internal security exhibition, between 30 September and 2 October; and if he will make a statement. [12562]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I understand that SBAC has entered into a contractual arrangement with British-American Promotions Ltd., and that the Copex exhibition will take place in September 1997.

Public Records (Disclosure)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress his Department has made in reviewing the files with Public Record Office class marks ES1/653 and ES1/654 with a view to opening them. [14387]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The review has been completed and the files are to be released to the Public Record Office.

Army Ranges (Dartmoor)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the advertised usage of Willsworthy range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ended December 1996, expressed by number of days; and how many days' firing took place. [15354]

Mr. Soames: The advertised usage of Willsworthy range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ending December 1996 expressed by number of days was 194. The number of days when firing actually took place was 109.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the advertised usage of Merrivale range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ended 1996, expressed by number of days; and how many days' firing took place. [15352]

Mr. Soames: The advertised usage of Merrivale range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ending December 1996 expressed by number of days was 121. The number of days when firing actually took place was 61.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the advertised usage of Okehampton range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ended 1996, expressed by number of days; and how many days' firing took place. [15353]

Mr. Soames: The advertised usage of Okehampton range in the Dartmoor national park for live firing in the year ending December 1996 expressed by number of days was 72. The number of days when firing actually took place was 36.

Royal Yacht

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what method it is proposed to ensure that the contract for the replacement royal yacht is placed with a ship building yard within the United Kingdom: [15248]

Mr. Arbuthnot: On security grounds, the future royal yacht can only be designed and built in a British shipyard. An invitation to tender for construction of the vessel will be advertised in the MOD contracts bulletin in the usual way.

Rugby League

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what to steps are being taken to facilitate the playing of rugby league football in the Royal Navy. [14253]

Mr. Soames: Those personnel who wish to play are offered encouragement and advice, and facilities are made available to them. Should enough people show an interest, consideration will be given to making rugby league an approved sport.

HEALTH

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to evaluate the possible causes of the cluster of CJD and suspected CJD cases in Kent; and if he will make a statement. [15259]

Mr. Horam: The national Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease surveillance unit monitors the incidence of CJD throughout the United Kingdom, including the possibility of significant clusters of cases. Its analysis of the distribution of cases of CJD has never found any convincing evidence of clustering.

Elderly People (Winter Assistance)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to help the elderly during the winter months in each of the last three years; and at what cost. [15388]

Mr. Burns: The Department is the major contributor to "Keep Warm Keep Well" campaigns. A breakdown of costs for the past three years is shown in the table. In previous years, the Department of Social Security—lately the Benefits Agency—has made contributions; the total expenditure column is inclusive of its contribution.

£000

	Total expenditure	*DSS contribution*
1995–96	578	125
1994–95	568	45
1993–94	510	60

PRIME MINISTER

EU Works Council Directive

Ms Quin: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the employment impact of the implementation by British companies of the EU works council directive agreed under the EU social chapter. [15020]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the speech I gave at the European Policy Forum in Brussels on the 4 February, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT

Refugees

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken to assess the additional costs to local government of concentrations of refugees seeking or having been granted asylum. [14963]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State for Health has established special grants to help local authorities meet the additional costs they face in respect of asylum-seeking families with children, and in respect of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. He laid before Parliament yesterday a special grant report to establish a new special grant for adult asylum seekers who are not accompanied by children. Local authority social services departments must provide detailed information on costs when submitting claims for any of these grants.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his statement of 3 February, *Official Report*, columns 681 and 689, concerning special grants to localities most in need of assistance due to concentrations of refugees, what discussions he has had, or intends to have, with representatives of the areas concerned. [14956]

Sir Paul Beresford: Ministers from my Department and the Department of Health as well as officials from the Department of Health have met local authority representatives on a number of occasions in recent months to discuss funding for local authorities who are supporting asylum seekers.

Green Belt

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the size of the green belt in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987, *(d)* 1992 and *(e)* at the current date. [14691]

Sir Paul Beresford: We do not keep records of the size of the green belt on an annual basis. Figures are available for England for 1979, 1989 and 1993. In 1979, there were 7,125 sq km of green belt land. This more than doubled in 1989 to 15,485 sq km and reached 15,557 sq km in 1993.

Council Housing and Tax

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the levels of *(a)* uncollected rents from council properties, *(b)* uncollected council tax, *(c)* uncollected community charge, and *(d)* empty council homes in each London borough. [14693]

Sir Paul Beresford: The latest available information is as follows:

	Rent arrears at 31 March 1995 (£000)	*Percentage of rent roll*	*Arrears outstanding at 31 March 1995 for:* Council tax (£000)	Community charge (£000)	*Empty council homes at 1 April 1995*	*Percentage of dwellings*
City of London	256	4.2	'—	'—	24	1.1
Camden	8,986	10.7	12,379	22,095	543	1.8
Greenwich	14,984	19.6	6,494	9,737	795	2.5
Hackney	32,675	31.6	4,588	10,470	3,894	9.8
Hammersmith and Fulham	6,553	15.1	6,752	7,186	343	2.1
Islington	16,072	16.0	'—	'—	1,483	4.0
Kensington and Chelsea	2,351	9.4	4,672	5,083	108	1.4
Lambeth	19,491	19.8	40,172	75,423	2,176	5.1
Lewisham	7,482	9.3	'—	'—	1,051	3.0
Southwark	26,160	20.8	10,811	25,290	1,129	2.1
Tower Hamlets	3,987	5.5	4,156	5,437	1,562	4.2
Wandsworth	4,362	6.7	2,091	181	508	2.4
Westminster	3,100	6.0	4,110	67	263	1.7
Barking and Dagenham	942	2.0	1,440	2,558	427	1.6
Barnet	1,401	3.8	6,678	10,281	124	0.9
Bexley	505	2.5	1,679	2,644	139	1.6
Brent	13,750	29.3	8,892	26,035	301	1.8
Bromley	0	0.0	1,963	1,944	5	6.3
Croydon	2,208	4.7	5,392	4,246	265	1.6
Ealing	10,809	19.1	'—	'—	210	1.3
Enfield	4,037	9.9	8,815	8,396	342	2.2
Haringey	20,318	33.4	'—	'—	303	1.5
Harrow	793	3.6	3,595	4,787	108	1.6
Havering	561	2.2	1,506	3,628	219	1.6
Hillingdon	933	2.2	4,857	6,586	159	1.2
Hounslow	2,483	7.1	4,087	15,618	333	2.0
Kingston upon Thames	507	3.0	'—	'—	97	1.7
Merton	1,168	4.5	3,211	4,238	89	0.9
Newham	7,886	13.6	12,052	24,397	735	2.8
Redbridge	1,142	5.0	'—	'—	515	7.6

	Rent arrears at 31 March 1995 (£000)	Percentage of rent roll	Arrears outstanding at 31 March 1995 for: Council tax (£000)	Community charge (£000)	Empty council homes at 1 April 1995	Percentage of dwellings
Richmond upon Thames	1,062	5.5	1,887	4,056	246	3.2
Sutton	1,265	5.2	1,215	1,555	76	0.8
Waltham Forest	2,404	6.6	8,134	16,656	465	2.9

[1] No information was published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy for these authorities.

Itinerants and Trespassers

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 in cases involving itinerants and *(a)* Wealden district council, *(b)* Lincolnshire county council and *(c)* Wolverhampton borough; and what measures he proposes to make provisions in respect of itinerants and trespassers more effective. [15096]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Sections 77 to 79 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order 1994 give local authorities powers to evict unauthorised campers. The High Court quashed an eviction order by Wealden district council in 1995 because the local authority had failed first to make inquiries about the campers' housing and social needs. The court allowed Lincolnshire county council's eviction order to stand because the authority had made sufficient inquiries. In the Wolverhampton borough council case, the judge said that the 1994 Act powers were intended to offer a "robust and speedy" means of eviction, although local authorities should give careful consideration before exercising them. I believe that local authorities which use the powers responsibly; and in accordance with advice in my Department's circular 18/94, "Gipsy Sites Policy and Unauthorised Camping", should be able to evict successfully when it is in the public interest to do so. The Government have no plans to amend the legislation, but have commissioned research to establish good practice.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state his reasons and the precedents for top-slicing the costs of specific local government reorganisation from the general grant available to local authorities. [15011]

Sir Paul Beresford: The reorganisation transitional damping grant scheme for 1997–98 will damp those council tax increases directly attributable to reorganisation that come above a threshold of £52 at band D. Such increases are not the result of the reorganised authorities' spending decisions. They occur where the pattern of spend in the past has not followed the standard spending assessment. The scheme is transitional and will protect council tax payers from increases above the threshold while the reorganised authorities adapt to their new circumstances.

A similar scheme operated in 1996–97 and was also funded through a top-slice of revenue support grant. Since 1994–95, we have also paid SSA reduction grant to authorities whose SSA has been reduced by more than a certain threshold as a result of changes in the SSA methodology. The funds for this have been top-sliced from RSG each year.

We consulted on the 1997–98 reorganisation transitional damping scheme as part of the consultation on the 1997–98 provisional local government finance settlement. We took all representations into account before taking our final decisions.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations underpinned his policy as set out at paragraph 14 of the Government's response, to the House of Lords Select Committee report on freedom of access to information on the environment of 5 February, that the Government do not accept that information in a draft document should be withheld only if harm would result from its exposure. [15458]

Mr. Gummer: It is reasonable that access to information, in a draft document or another form, should wait completion of work so that analysis and interpretation can proceed unhindered. This is provided for in paragraph 4(d) of the Environmental Information Regulations 1992, and elaborated in paragraph 53 of the guidance.

Elderly People (Winter Assistance)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he has taken to help the elderly during the winter months in each of the last three years; and at what cost. [15389]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Our home energy efficiency scheme helps householders who are aged 60 or over, or who receive income-related benefits or certain disability allowances, to keep their homes more comfortable and energy efficient by providing grants for basic home insulation and energy advice. The following amounts in grant have been paid to householders claiming on grounds of age in each of the last three years:

1994–95: £40,374,000

1995–96: £65,871,000

1996–97 (to date): £27,074,000

In addition, we are providing funding for various energy saving trust programmes which may benefit elderly people. These include their pilot pensioners' energy plan to demonstrate how local authorities and private finance providers in partnership can help pensioners to make energy efficient improvements to their homes; the cavity wall insulation programme and the heating controls cash-back scheme. We are providing around £7 million for these programmes.

Waterways

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received preliminary reports from British Waterways and the Environment Agency

examining individual waterways in response to the Government's conclusions to the review of British Waterways and agency navigation functions; and if he will make a statement. [15832]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: British Waterways and the Environment Agency have submitted a joint report following a series of regional reviews of the river navigations under their control. I have placed a copy of their report in the Library.

In the light of the regional reviews, BW and EA recommended further detailed studies. I have accordingly accepted the suggestion that BW and the agency undertake a detailed review of the division of responsibilities on the River Weaver. I have also invited BW to carry out a three-month study, in consultation with the agency, of the Great Ouse and the Nene to examine what it could do if it managed the navigation aspects of these two rivers. This study should cover, among other things, costs and benefits, environmental impacts and the views of all interested parties on such an arrangement.

The report concludes that relationships between the two organisations are good and that BW and the agency are already working well together in many areas. The reviews have identified a number of steps that can be taken to improve this collaboration further. I endorse the organisations' efforts to identify efficiency gains, ways of working more effectively and means of providing service improvements.

At the third annual inland navigation seminar on 4 December 1996, BW and the agency, together with the Broads Authority, created the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities. I support this initiative and look forward to it making a positive contribution across the range of navigation policy issues. I hope that BW and the EA will progress jointly their ideas to develop a national navigation strategy in consultation with the new association and the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council.

Fire Services

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total element of standard spending assessments related to fire services in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the annual spending of fire authorities within the same period. [15250]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* The information requested is in the table:

£ billion

Year	*Fire standard spending assessment*	*Revenue expenditure on fire*
1993–94	1.139	1.204
1994–95	1.168	1.210
1995–96	1.168	1.260
1996–97	1.185	[1]1.299
1997–98	1.237	—

Figures for 1993–94 and 1994–95 refer to fire and civil defence.
[1] Budgeted.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television Licence Fee Regulations

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the television licence fee regulations. [15562]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today laid new consolidated television licence fee regulations before both Houses. These will:

(i) bring into effect the licence fees for the year commencing 1 April 1997, as announced on 18 December last year columns *591–92*—the colour fee will be £91.50 and the black and white one will be £30.50;

(ii) extend coverage of a television licence to permit the installation and use of television in any mobile home, static or tourjng caravan, or other vehicle or vessel used by members of the household, subject to certain provisos; and

(iii) fulfil the Government's undertaking to stop sheltered housing schemes from being disqualified from the concessionary television licence arrangements simply because a small number of units within them have been purchased under the right-to-buy provisions of the Housing Act 1985.

The basic principle of the TV licensing system has always been that a TV licence is required for any place, vehicle or vessel in which TV is installed or used. The changes summarised in the following paragraph are designed to sustain the integrity and enforceability of the licensing system, to protect the BBC's income and to be fair and reasonable in applying the basic principle to the increasing use of television outside a household's main place of residence.

Hitherto, the regulations have permitted a household's TV licence to cover all the TV sets at one place, vehicle or vessel, but no sets elsewhere, except in the comparatively rare case where such sets are powered by their own internal batteries. The regulations I have laid today extend the coverage of a TV licence in a number of ways:

(a) A household with a licence for its main residence may also, under that licence, receive TV in a vehicle, touring caravan or vessel. None of these is commonly used as a residence for any substantial period of time. Households which do use them as their main residence will continue to need a TV licence.

(b) Similarly, any TV set in a mobile home or static caravan which is not in use as a main residence will not require a separate licence, provided that there is no simultaneous use there and at the household's main residence. This qualification reflects the fact that mobile homes and static caravans are more likely to be used for lengthy periods as a household's main place of residence. Use of television in other, fixed, second homes will continue to require a separate TV licence.

(c) Commercially operated caravan sites where caravans with TV are provided will continue to benefit from the concessionary hotel licence offered to establishments which provide units of overnight accommodation on a single site. The regulations extend this concession to units of entertainment, such as boxes at sports grounds or suites at conference centres.

The Government undertaking concerning the impact of the right-to-buy legislation on the concessionary television licence scheme—under which qualifying households pay only £5 for a TV licence—was made during the Commons Committee stage of the Broadcasting Act 1996, on 18 June 1996, *Official Report*,

columns
749–51. The new regulations will enable residents of sheltered housing schemes which meet all the other qualifying criteria to benefit from the TV licence concession, provided that not more than 25 per cent. of the dwellings in the scheme have been purchased under the right-to-buy provisions.

The consolidated regulations will also incorporate other changes made last year, by separate amending regulations. These relate to deregulation of the previous requirements for TV dealers to register with the licensing authority and to hold a separate TV dealer demonstration licence and the introduction last August of a new cash instalment payment scheme aimed at making it easier for those on low incomes to pay the licence fee.

Tourism Strategy

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what response she has received to her Department's new strategy for tourism, "Success through Partnership". [15829]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: "Success through Partnership: A Strategy for Tourism" builds on the successful programme we have completed over the last two years, which has developed a closer working relationship than ever before between Government and industry. The recent report of the National Heritage Select Committee has helped to inform the development of this tourism strategy. The Government's strategy document has been warmly welcomed as a joint initiative with the industry.

The strategy provides a clear statement of our objectives for the tourism industry and an agenda for future action. It represents a true partnership and involves key players from central and local government, tourist boards, the industry, trade and professional bodies and consumer groups. All have been fully involved in preparing and taking forward the strategy and are committed to developing tourism as a high quality, profitable and sustainable activity to realise the growth potential of the industry and the associated social and cultural benefits for the nation.

The strategy covers six main areas:

- creating the right framework for success—raising the public profile and prestige of tourism;
- improving the quality of the tourism product;
- developing a world-class human resource;
- making marketing more effective—co-ordinating effort and pooling resources to optimise impact;
- improving information provision; and
- managing tourism demand and impacts—sustainable tourism that spreads the benefits and protects the environment that attracts tourists in the first place.

Copies of the document are available in the Libraries of the House.

Tourism (Suffolk and Norfolk)

Mr. Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the impact of Government tourism policy on *(a)* Suffolk and *(b)* Norfolk since 1987. [12722]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Norfolk and Suffolk have benefited from significant growth in tourism in the UK in recent years. The number of employees in the British tourism industry grew by approximately 24 per cent. between March 1986 and March 1996. In 1995, earnings from tourism were £38 billion—a record in real terms—and signs are that 1996 will be even better. The UK is now fifth in the world in terms of tourism earnings. The UK's domestic tourism earnings were £22.7 billion in 1995. Figures for tourism spend in individual counties are not available. However, domestic tourism spend in the east of England region increased from £490 million in 1987 to £960 million in 1995 and overseas visitor income increased from £183 million in 1987 to £566 million in 1995. International passenger survey figures show that the number of visits by overseas visitors to Norfolk increased from 164,000 in 1994 to 176,000 in 1995, and those to Suffolk from 129,000 in 1994 to 142,000 in 1995. Government support for the industry is channelled through the British Tourist Authority and the English Tourist Board.

I am pleased to note that over £10.5 million of lottery funding has been awarded to Suffolk and Norfolk to date for projects to promote culture, heritage and the arts. Other Government programmes include a seven-year regeneration initiative launched last April in Lowestoft, which aims to improve and develop the local area, and also, to develop the tourism potential.

London is one of this country's main draws for overseas visitors, and one of the main aims of the Focus London campaign, which has received £7 million of public funding over three years, has been to promote London as a gateway to the rest of the country. The Government are committed to encouraging overseas visitors to travel to all parts of the country. In 1995, the British Tourist Authority's British travel centre in London gave help and advice on travelling outside the capital to almost half a million overseas visitors. These initiatives will boost tourism in the regions and greatly benefit the employment prospects and wealth of those living locally.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judges (Directorships)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what steps are taken *(a)* at the time of their appointment and *(b)* subsequently, to ensure that his Department is informed of company directorships held by judges. [14379]

(2) how many full-time judges at each level within the judiciary hold company directorships; and what guidance his Department issues to judges about the circumstances in which a conflict of interest arising from such a position might arise. [14369]

Mr. Streeter: Full-time judges are advised before appointment that they should not hold commercial directorships during their service on the Bench, although some forms of non-commercial directorships may be acceptable. Subject to these general principles, each case is dealt with on its individual circumstances.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Kenya

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each of the last five years for which figures are available
(a) projects in Kenya which received aid and *(b)* the total amount of aid to Kenya; and if he will make a statement. [15226]

Dr. Liam Fox: The gross public expenditure to Kenya over the last five years has amounted to £166,493,000 broken down as follows:

	£ millions
1991–92	38,351
1992–93	37,514
1993–94	31,231
1994–95	30,214
1995–96	29,183

Major sectors of involvement have been, and continue to be, health and population, education, renewable natural resources, roads and small enterprise development.

Over the last two years, there has been major expenditure—over £1 million—on each of the following projects:

Primary education in-service project: £2.3 million

Moi university library: £2 million

Supplies project for HIV-AIDS prevention: £1.6 million

Essential drugs provision: £1.5 million

Emergency supply of essential drugs: £1.5 million

Molo-Litein roads upgrading: £1.5 million

K-Rep's Juhudi credit small scale:

Enterprise project: £1.5 million

Protected areas wildlife project: £1.4 million

Family planning services: £1.4 million

Contraceptive supply: £1.2 million

Tick-borne diseases research project: £1 million.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department is giving to Kenya to combat the effects of the water hyacinth in Lake Victoria; and if he will make a statement. [15228]

Dr. Fox: We are giving no direct assistance to Kenya to combat the effects of the water hyacinth in Lake Victoria. Assistance is, however, being provided by other donors, including the World bank and the European Union.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Tea Room (No Smoking Areas)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee (1) if he will consult hon. Members about the location of designated no smoking areas in the Members' Tea Room; and if he will make a statement; [15174]

(2) what consultation took place with hon. Members concerning the designation of no smoking areas in the Members' Tea Room; and if he will make a statement. [15175]

Sir Colin Shepherd: The Catering Committee keeps under constant review the policy regarding smoking in all Refreshment Department outlets, including, of course, in the Tea Room. In each of the last three years, hon. Members have had the opportunity to respond to the Refreshment Department's customer questionnaire, which welcomes comments on smoking policy. The results of the last survey were considered by the Committee at its meeting on 22 January. The Committee was encouraged by the fact that, based on the responses to the specific questions on smoking, the existing arrangements appear to have the support of a majority of respondents. Hon. Members may also make their views known throughout the year by using the comments books available in all outlets, which I read frequently.

TREASURY

Illegal Drug Use (Questions)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy as to when questions on statistics on illegal drug use are to be answered by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Department of Health, *(c)* the Home Office, *(d)* the Leader of the House and *(e)* other Departments. [14653]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* Ministerial responsibility varies according to the information sought and the availability of data, as follows:

(a) The Office for National Statistics collects and publishes information on all deaths registered in England and Wales and codes cause of death.

(b) The Department of Health deals with medical and health aspects of drug misuse, and compiles information on drug addicts in index form. Data are available on the age and sex of the addict, drug used, injecting behaviour and agency type, at regional health authority level, and at district health authority level. They are published on an annual basis.

The Department of Health also compiles a variety of aggregated data on problem drug misuse. The data cover England and are published twice a year.

(c) The Home Office collects and publishes information on persons notified as being addicted to opiates and cocaine and all drug-related deaths, as well as data on drug offences and drug seizures made by the police and by HM Customs and Excise. The Home Office also compiles data on drugs and criminal justice. They include details of offenders by age, sex, offence, drug involved, police force area, disposal and sentence, and are available by United Kingdom police force area. Data on drugs offenders have been collected centrally since 1967. Statistics on seizures are based on returns received directly from Customs and Excise and the police.

(d) HM Customs and Excise also collates information on types and weights of drugs seized at frontiers. The Department for Education and Employment's principal role is to disseminate advice and guidance on drug education and prevention to schools, youth workers, and teachers in further and higher education. It also supports many local groups and funds the training of teachers and community workers who are engaged in tackling the problems of drug abuse and has published several documents accordingly.

(e) Co-ordination of the Government's drug strategy is the responsibility of the Lord President.

Parliamentary Questions (Cost)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidelines exist for determining whether providing the answer to a parliamentary question would involve disproportionate cost; what steps are taken to ensure that officials do not avoid undertaking work on researching information for Ministers by wrongly claiming that the research would involve disproportionate cost; and what sanctions *(a)* have been and *(b)* could be imposed on officials in such circumstances. [15431]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Treasury Ministers aim to answer written parliamentary questions as fully as possible and in accordance with guidance on disproportionate cost. Ministers may decline to answer, in whole or in part, a written parliamentary question where the marginal cost of preparing the answer is likely to exceed the current advisory limit of £450. The decision to use this cost threshold rests with Ministers, who may decide that questions should be answered irrespective of cost.

I am not aware of any instances where officials have sought to make improper use of the threshold. If officials were to do so, this would be an internal matter for the Department concerned.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what proportion of people aged under 25 years are *(a)* in full-time employment, *(b)* in part-time employment, *(c)* in full-time education and *(d)* on Government-supported training schemes in (i) Yorkshire and Humberside and (ii) England, as at spring 1996. [14305]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dr. M. P. G. Pepper to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 12 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent Question on the proportion of people aged under 25 in employment, education and training in Yorkshire and Humberside and in England. The Director has asked me to reply in his absence.

In answering your Question, I have incorporated two improvements when compared with the Answer on 24 July 1996 in the Official Report column 547, and for this reason I am providing comparable data for 1991 through to 1996.

First: the information on numbers in employment, education and training relate to persons aged 16–24 and are expressed as a proportion of the corresponding age group rather than all persons aged under 25.

Secondly: the number in employment include some persons who are in full-time education. Separate details are given for those in full-time education with and without jobs.

The Answer in the attached tables is derived from the Labour Force Survey. However, participation in Government supported training schemes is known to be under-recorded in the Labour Force Survey compared with administrative sources. The employee figures in the tables therefore include a number who should otherwise be shown as on such schemes.

Persons aged 16 to 24 years: at spring (thousands)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Full-time employment[1]						
Yorkshire and Humberside	346	283	269	235	233	213
England	3,170	2,738	2,471	2,319	2,257	2,166
Part-time employment[1]						
Yorkshire and Humberside	69	86	81	89	87	93
England	732	769	778	842	853	966
Full-time education (with a job)[2]						
Yorkshire and Humberside	49	54	45	55	62	63
England	521	534	485	589	596	682
Full-time education (without a job)						
Yorkshire and Humberside	96	112	117	130	132	143
England	906	1,101	1,131	1,191	1,247	1,172
Government-supported training and employment programmes						
Yorkshire and Humberside	28	27	27	23	21	17
England	231	196	188	174	144	125

Note:
[1] Excludes Government-supported training and employment programmes.
[2] Included in employment estimates.
Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Persons aged 16 to 24 years: at spring (per cent.)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Full-time employment[1]						
Yorkshire and Humberside	52	44	43	39	40	37
England	51	46	43	41	41	40
Part-time employment[1]						
Yorkshire and Humberside	10	13	13	15	15	16
England	12	13	13	15	16	18

Persons aged 16 to 24 years: at spring (per cent.)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Full-time education (with a job)[2]						
Yorkshire and Humberside	7	8	7	9	11	11
England	8	9	8	10	11	13
Full-time education (without a job)						
Yorkshire and Humberside	15	17	19	22	23	25
England	15	18	20	21	23	22
Government-supported training and employment programmes						
Yorkshire and Humberside	4	4	4	4	4	3
England	4	3	3	3	3	2

Notes:
[1] Excludes Government-supported training and employment programmes.
[2] Included in employment estimates.
Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his letter of 3 April 1996 to the director general of the House Builders Federation constitutes Government policy on exemptions to the landfill tax; to what extent the policies in that statement were implemented in the Landfill Tax (Contaminated Land) Order 1996; and if he will make a statement. [13595]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* I assume that the letter to which my hon. Friend refers is the one written by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) when he was Paymaster General. In paragraph 3 of the letter, my right hon. Friend said

> "We now intend to provide the exemption for waste from the clearance of historically contaminated land where clearance of all or part of the contamination is necessary to allow the land to be used for the intended purpose when the development or work on the land is complete. The exemption will apply to waste arising from the reclamation of the land, but current polluters will not be able to benefit from it."

He went on to say in paragraph 5

> "You suggest that the exemption should be widened to cover clay and other material that has to be removed from high density urban infill sites. I should first of all say that if a site is historically contaminated it is intended that all of the waste removed and disposed of to landfill will be exempt under our proposed exemption, not just that which is contaminated."

This letter sets our Government policy that, to qualify for the exemption, such wastes would need to arise from a reclamation which facilitates development of the land and removes the potential for the pollutants to cause harm. The removal of the pollutants must be necessary for the development to proceed and any activity that gave rise to the pollutants must have ceased. Where these criteria are met, then all wastes, whether polluted or not, arising from the reclamation would qualify for the exemption. This policy is reflected in the Landfill Tax (Contaminated Land) Order 1996. Copies of the letter have been placed in the Library.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, indicating how much has been spent on legal advice and from whom it was obtained. [14539]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The amount spent by my departments on external advice, including legal advice, in relation to giving evidence to the Scott inquiry and the preparation of the Government's response to it, is £83,740. Of this figure, the cost of legal advice amounted to £74,080, which was the cost to Customs and Excise of external legal advice obtained from two firms of solicitors, Lewis Silkin and Clifford Chance, including the cost of legal advice to counsel required to provide evidence to the inquiry in relation to the Customs prosecutions being examined. The balance of the figure was incurred by the Treasury for general consultancy services of a non-legal nature.

Pension Contributions (Tax Relief)

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals would be affected if relief for pension contributions were to be limited for income tax purposes to the standard rate; and what would be the total extra tax raised. [14869]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* The estimated full year yield of restricting income tax relief for pension contributions to the basic rate at 1997–98 income levels would be about £880 million. Some 2 million taxpayers would be affected. This is based on a projection of the 1994 survey of personal incomes and other survey data in line with the assumptions in the Budget forecast. It does not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from such a change.

National Savings

Mr. Hall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *565*, what was the date on which the decision was made to audit and certify all National Savings accounts. [15254]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* The decision to audit and certify all national savings product accounts was taken on 20 May 1994.

German Unemployment Level

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the January

rise in German unemployment on *(a)* progress towards European convergence and *(b)* United Kingdom growth prospects. [15364]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* German claimant unemployment rose 510,000 to 4,658,000 in January 1997. On a seasonally adjusted basis, it rose 160,000 to 4,317,000. The Government take the view that it is unlikely, although not impossible, that there will be sufficient convergence for economic and monetary union to proceed safely on 1 January 1999. The UK recovery is broadly based and growth is forecast to continue to be faster than in our major European competitors.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bread (Labelling)

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what requirements are placed upon food manufacturers regarding the labelling of iron content of bread; and if he will make a statement. [14995]

Mrs. Browning: If the flour used in bread making contains no added ingredients other than the statutorily required nutrients such as iron, then the addition of these nutrients need not be declared in the ingredients list of pre-packed bread. If any other ingredient is added to the flour then all the ingredients added to the flour, including the nutrients such as iron, must be declared in the ingredients list of pre-packed bread.

These labelling rules do not apply to non pre-packed bread.

Habitat Depletion and Contamination

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he has taken to reduce the contamination of the habitats of birds and wild mammals from herbicides and pesticides; what studies have been *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated by his Department into the effects on habitats of pesticides and herbicides; and what assessment he has made of the impact of habitat depletion and contamination on wild birds in the United Kingdom. [15064]

Mrs. Browning: The direct impact of each pesticide product on birds and wild mammals is assessed before an approval for that product is granted. Advice on the protection of wildlife and their habitats is provided particularly through the Code of Practice on the Safe Use of Pesticides on Farms and Holdings.

Details of current Government research were provided in my reply today and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 17 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *544*, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). The results of this research will be evaluated when available.

Song Birds

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the consequences for the numbers and varieties of song birds of the range of arable incentive schemes proposed by his Department. [14674]

Mr. Boswell: The Ministry's agri-environment schemes encourage agricultural practices which are sympathetic to the requirements of song birds. We have also recently introduced new payments for retaining winter stubbles and undersowing arable crops with grass in two environmentally sensitive areas; and we have announced proposals for a pilot scheme as part of countryside stewardship to test the most effective arable farming methods to protect wildlife species such as farmland birds. On the basis of advice from English Nature and environmental bodies and of published research, these measures should bring significant benefits for song birds in England.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the summer use of *(a)* organophosphates and *(b)* pyrethroids on the numbers and range of songbirds. [14675]

Mrs. Browning: The Department of the Environment and English Nature, on behalf of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, are funding a review of the available information on the indirect effects of pesticides on farmland birds. I understand that the results will be published later this year.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is also funding relevant research which was listed in the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on 17 December *Official Report*, column 544.

The results of these projects will be made available to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides and the Pesticides Forum.

Fisheries Agreements

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list those countries which benefit from the EU fisheries agreements with third countries, including their respective share of such agreements by weight of catch and value; [14828]

(2) what share of EU fisheries agreements with third countries has been appointed to the United Kingdom in each year since 1986; [14829]

(3) if he will list those third party countries which have fisheries agreements with the European Union. [14832]

Mr. Baldry: Much of this information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the answers that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) on 28 October and 7 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *52* and *660* respectively, which provided details of current fisheries agreements between the European Community and third countries.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the United Kingdom contribution in *(a)* sterling and *(b)* percentage terms to the cost of EU fisheries agreements with third countries for each year since 1986; [14830]

(2) what was the cost in sterling of the EU fisheries agreements with third countries in each year since 1986. [14831]

Mr. Baldry: Details of the cost to the EU budget of fisheries agreements with third countries are given in the table.

Cost of EU fisheries agreements with third countries

	ECU (million)	*£ (million)*
1986	55.6	36.0
1987	81.9	58.9
1988	139.5	94.6
1989	161.5	105.7
1990	173.0	122.8
1991	171.4	119.9
1992	195.6	138.4
1993	188.9	148.5
1994	140.6	107.7
1995	158.1	127.7
1996[1]	270.0	226.7

[1] Budget appropriation. Final outturn expenditure figures not yet available.

Source:
EU budget documents 1988–1996.

Exchange rates used

1986: 1 ecu = £0.64785

1987: 1 ecu = £0.71932

1988: 1 ecu = £0.67834

1989: 1 ecu = £0.65474

1990: 1 ecu = £0.70995

1991: 1 ecu = £0.69973

1992: 1 ecu = £0.70765

1993: 1 ecu = £0.78627

1994: 1 ecu = £0.76626

1995: 1 ecu = £0.80792

1996: 1 ecu = £0.83991

The United Kingdom contributes to the EU budget as a whole and it is not therefore possible to identify separately the UK contribution to EU fisheries agreements with third countries. Details of UK contributions can be found in the annual White Paper statements on the EU budget. In 1996, the UK's gross contribution to the budget was about 15 per cent. of the total.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will support the recommendations of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities in its Third report of Session 1996–97 on third country fisheries agreements, HL 28, that the recipients of EU fisheries agreements with third countries should pay a greater share of the cost of such agreements. [14833]

Mr. Baldry: The Government welcome this timely and balanced report and will provide a full and considered response in due course. I made it clear in my oral evidence to the sub-committee that I consider it reasonable that those fishermen and member states benefitting from fisheries agreements with third countries should contribute a greater share of the costs.

Water Pollution (Thruxted)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what information he has received concerning the possible contamination of drinking water by waste discharged from Canterbury Mills, Thruxted, Kent; and if he will make a statement; [15260]

(2) what reports he has received from the Environment Agency concerning their investigation of wastewater arrangements at Canterbury Mills, Thruxted, Kent; and if he will make a statement. [15261]

Mr. Baldry: Drinking water quality is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for the Environment and of the drinking water inspectorate. The local water company, Mid Kent Water, confirms that its tests show that water supplies taken from the area are of the highest chemical and microbiological standard. The tests are subject to stringent analytical quality control and independent scrutiny by the drinking water inspectorate.

This Department has received a copy of the draft report of the risk assessment carried out into waste water disposal options at Canterbury Mills and the possible effect on the quality of drinking water. The Environment Agency has commissioned studies into the possible effects of waste water disposal arrangements at Canterbury Mills and has made these available to the planning inspector for use during the public inquiry now underway to determine a planning application by Canterbury Mills.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what evidence he plans to submit to the forthcoming public inquiry relating to planning proposals for a new underground water drainage system adjacent to Canterbury Mills, Thruxted, Kent; and if he will make a statement. [15262]

Mr. Baldry: This Department prepared a statement regarding the operation of Canterbury Mills rendering plant in the context of animal health legislation, to the planning inspector on 10 January 1997 for use at the public inquiry. A copy is being placed in the Library of the House.

Salmonella Gold Coast Contamination

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department first received evidence of the possibility that cows from Wyke Farms of Somerset were source of Salmonella gold coast infection; and if he will make a statement. [11793]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 22 January 1997]:* Epidemiological evidence first linked an outbreak of Salmonella gold coast to the consumption of cheese produced at Wyke Farms on 14 December 1996.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the methods used to monitor the efficiency of each Government Department in answering parliamentary questions, with particular reference to the expected lengths of time to answer questions and the action taken in the case of excessive delays. [14902]

Mr. Freeman: Each departmental Minister is responsible for answering the parliamentary questions put to them in a timely manner.

For questions for written answer on a named day, Standing Order 18(4) requires that an answer should be given on the day named by the Member. Wherever possible, this will be a substantive reply but, where this is not possible, Ministers will give a holding reply and provide a substantive reply as soon as possible thereafter.

Within my Department, instructions have been given that Ministers will wish, wherever possible, to be in a position to provide a substantive reply on the day named; and, in the case of ordinary written questions, within five working days of the question being tabled.

Information Systems (Millennium Compliance)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures his Department has taken to ensure that each Government Department's information systems will be millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [15132]

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 9 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *4* and to the reply given to Lord Stallard on 27 January by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, column *963*.

The integrity and continuity of government information systems are essentially the responsibility of individual departments. However, the Deputy Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster have personally ensured that all ministerial heads of Department and permanent secretaries are aware of the problem and are implementing plans of action in relation to their computer systems and that all Departments plan to complete the work in time—*Official Report*, 27 January 1997, column *963*.

"Government Direct"

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the costs of the proposals set out in the Green Paper, "Government Direct"; and if he will make a statement. [15072]

Mr. Freeman: The scale of investment required has not yet been fully determined. However, the proposals will not involve capital investment of public funds. The Government's private finance initiative will allow the private sector to provide services of the type outlined in the Green Paper. Money to pay the contractors would come from part of the savings in the cost of government administration.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Officers (Bravery Medal)

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the initiative to introduce a medal for prison officers recognising exceptional bravery in the course of their work. [14670]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Spencer Batiste, dated 12 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about introducing a Prison Service medal.

Consideration is currently being given to the establishment of a Queen's Prison Service medal. I strongly support this proposal and hope that it will be possible to create it.

Armed Police Officers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the presence of an officer with a sub-machine gun in Mansell street, Whitechapel, at midnight on 3 February; [14834]

(2) if he will make a statement on the arming of police officers with sub-machine guns in London. [14835]

Mr. Maclean: I understand that an officer armed with a carbine was carrying out counter-terrorist duties in the Mansell street area. The officer was part of a patrol exercising powers under section 13A of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 to stop and search vehicles and their occupants for articles which could be used for terrorist purposes. The weapon was not a sub-machine gun, but a carbine specially adapted to fire only one shot at a time. Such carbines are one of a number of weapons available for general issue to members of the City of London police tactical firearms group.

The City of London police have no automatic carbines. The Metropolitan police have a small number of automatic carbines. These are to be issued only under the most stringent conditions and in the most exceptional circumstances. It would not be in the interests of security for me to discuss any further details about the circumstances or conditions under which these weapons might be deployed.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum applications are currently awaiting an initial decision by his Department's asylum directorate; and how many of these applications were made in *(a)* 1991 or earlier, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993, *(d)* 1994, *(e)* 1995 and *(f)* 1996; [13264]

(2) how many asylum applications are outstanding from nationals of *(a)* Afghanistan, *(b)* Iran, *(c)* Iraq, *(d)* Somalia and *(e)* the former Yugoslavia; and how many of these applications were made in (i) 1992 or earlier, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994, (iv) 1995 and (v) 1996. [13267]

Miss Widdecombe: The number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision as at 31 December 1996 was 55,695, a reduction on the equivalent figure for the end of 1995—69,650. Of those applications currently awaiting an initial decision, the number which had been made following the implementation of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals

Act 1993 has now been revised to 43,025. This follows an extensive count of cases which has shown that the method of estimation previously used underestimated the number of pre-1993 Act cases that have been decided. An estimated breakdown of the years in which those asylum applications awaiting an initial decision were made, in total and for the nationalities requested, is given in the table.

Asylum applications from requested nationalities awaiting an initial decision as at 31 December 1996, by year of application

Nationality	Applications outstanding[1]		Year of application[2]					
			1996	1995	1994	1993	1992	Pre-1992
	Number	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.
Afghanistan	730	100	50	35	10	5	0	0
Iran	1,095	100	30	35	15	5	15	0
Iraq	985	100	45	40	10	5	0	0
Somalia	450	100	45	45	10	5	0	0
former Yugoslavia	4,045	100	10	25	10	15	35	0
All nationalities	55,695	100	20	35	20	10	10	10

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.
[2] Estimates rounded to the nearest 5 per cent.

Crime and Detection

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* West Yorkshire, *(b)* West Midlands, *(c)* Tyne and Wear, *(d)* Greater Manchester, *(e)* South Yorkshire and *(f)* Merseyside in 1994–95 and 1995–96 (i) the crime figures and (ii) the detection rate by category of crime. [14809]

Mr. Maclean : The available information is contained in the following table:

Notifiable offences recorded by the police and clear ups

Offence group	Number of offences		Percentage cleared up[1,2]	
	1994–95	1995–96	1994	1995
West Yorkshire				
Violence against the person	8,997	8,520	81	82
Sexual offences	1,387	1,530	84	93
Robbery	2,910	3,497	28	25
Burglary	86,332	91,389	15	16
Theft and handling stolen goods	131,233	128,306	18	19
Fraud and forgery	5,411	4,876	57	55
Criminal damage	44,795	45,691	12	13
Other offences	2,766	2,948	100	100
Total	283,831	286,757	20	21
West Midlands				
Violence against the person	9,714	8,528	70	66
Sexual offences	1,325	1,148	71	66
Robbery	87,571	8,081	19	18
Burglary	7,201	91,842	27	30
Theft and handling stolen goods	140,812	152,187	23	21
Fraud and forgery	7,892	7,573	31	27
Criminal damage	52,605	54,329	13	11
Other offences	1,866	1,973	95	94
Total	308,986	325,661	25	24
Northumbria (including Tyne and Wear)				
Violence against the person	6,111	5,482	74	73
Sexual offences	702	545	77	75
Robbery	1,234	1,653	23	26
Burglary	55,398	51,513	14	14
Theft and handling stolen goods	81,073	77,275	24	25
Fraud and forgery	2,935	2,447	44	43
Criminal damage	51,381	51,256	16	17
Other offences	995	1,060	98	100
Total	199,829	191,231	22	23
Greater Manchester				
Violence against the person	8,609	9,610	74	70
Sexual offences	1,192	1,369	74	73
Robbery	5,229	5,938	29	22
Burglary	89,092	86,474	32	19
Theft and handling stolen goods	152,603	149,500	33	23
Fraud and forgery	7,726	5,853	70	48
Criminal damage	65,339	70,384	19	16
Other offences	2,544	2,761	98	97
Total	332,334	331,889	34	24
South Yorkshire				
Violence against the person	4,957	4,842	82	81
Sexual offences	647	634	88	81
Robbery	1,004	1,266	31	27
Burglary	48,084	46,555	20	22
Theft and handling stolen goods	69,827	72,610	23	22
Fraud and forgery	2,876	2,557	40	35
Criminal damage	25,084	28,441	16	15
Other offences	1,345	1,203	99	100
Total	153,824	158,108	24	24
Merseyside				
Violence against the person	7,726	8,162	63	67
Sexual offences	857	889	77	82
Robbery	2,090	3,103	17	20
Burglary	32,927	33,948	27	19
Theft and handling stolen goods	67,372	75,960	35	26
Fraud and forgery	3,044	4,687	70	64
Criminal damage	23,033	27,055	18	15
Other offences	1,740	2,109	96	99
Total	138,789	155,913	33	27

[1] Excluding criminal damage value £20 and under.
[2] Published on a calendar year basis only.

Metropolitan Police Stations

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which police stations *(a)* have been closed and *(b)* opened and on what dates in the Metropolitan police area in the last five years for which information is available; and which police stations (i) will be opened and (ii) will close in the next 12 months. [15139]

Mr. Maclean: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has provided the following information:

Year	*Stations/offices closed*	*Stations/offices opened*
1992	Kings Cross Road	Archway
	Islington	Canary Wharf
	Forest Gate	Brick Lane
	Bow Street	Chalkhill
		Islington
		Forest Gate
		Charing Cross
1993	Rochester Row	Walworth
	Gerald Road	Belgravia
	Carter Street	Ashford
		Marks Gate
		North Greenford
		Wapping
1994	Bexleyheath	Bexleyheath
	Erith	Doran Walk
		Haggerston
		Bluebeat
		Little Ilford
		Broadwater Farm
1995	Ilford	Ilford
	Roman Road	Bethnel Green
	Jesus Green	Harefield
	Harefield	Cray
		Wornington Green
		Dalston
		Erith
1996	Bethnel Green	Hoe Street
	Leman Street	
	Caledonian Road	
	Wornington Green	

Police stations which were closed and re-opened after being completely renovated and/or extended in the last five years

Year	*Station*
1992	Fulham
1993	Barkingside
1996	Hammersmith
	Hounslow

Stations/offices to close in the next 12 months	*Stations/offices to open in the next 12 months*
West Hendon	Archway
Isle of Dogs (old)	Colindale
Mill Hill	Kings Cross
Vine Street	Isle of Dogs
	Walhamstow Market
	West End Central

Young Offender Institutions

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to withhold access to card-operated telephones from young offenders held at *(a)* Her Majesty's young offenders institution, Colchester and *(b)* other young offender institutions; [15155]

(2) what plans he has to censor mail sent to young offenders held at *(a)* HM YOI Colchester and *(b)* other young offender institutions. [15154]

Miss Widdecombe: For the first two stages of the regime at Colchester young offender institution, young offenders will be allowed a supervised weekly call to their family on an official telephone. In the third and final stage, access to card-operated telephones will be as it is in other young offender institutions. In addition, young offenders will be allowed welfare calls at the discretion of staff. Staff will read all mail sent to young offenders at Colchester, with the exception of legal correspondence.

There are no plans to change the access to card-operated telephones or the arrangements for reading inmates' correspondence in other young offender institutions.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of persons who come to the United Kingdom as visitors but stay on as illegal immigrants in each of the last three years; and if he will take measures to provide the maximum flexibility in permitting visitor entry, with the maximum checks on overstaying. [15095]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information available relates to all overstayers who were issued with a notice of intention to deport. There were 4,850 such persons in 1994, 4,660 in 1995 and 5,600—provisional figure—in 1996. All persons seeking entry as visitors are given leave to enter providing they satisfy the immigration rules, and enforcement action is taken against those who breach their conditions of leave to enter by, for example, overstaying.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the crime clear-up rate and annual percentage change in each year since 1979 in each region; and if he will make a statement; [15013]

(2) what was the clear-up rate for all crimes in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales in (i) 1979, (ii) 1983, (iii) 1987 and (iv) in each year since 1992 for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [15016]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the tables.

Percentage change on previous year in number of notifiable offences cleared up by police force area

Police area	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Avon and Somerset	–6	8	5	12	–4	7	4	–7	13
Bedfordshire	14	–9	1	2	1	7	–4	–13	5
Cambridgeshire	–30	44	12	–32	–2	–1	10	–8	–1
Cheshire	6	15	3	4	3	–2	–4	–2	2
Cleveland	–8	–9	21	6	–2	–8	2	5	5
Cumbria	1	–23	4	8	7	24	8	–5	4
Derbyshire	10	–10	29	–1	4	19	–5	–15	–5
Devon and Cornwall	–1	8	4	17	2	3	14	–8	2
Dorset	–11	4	–6	16	–1	9	5	–8	12
Durham	–2	7	10	1	–5	4	17	–10	7
Essex	–2	5	5	3	5	–3	13	–7	–4
Gloucestershire	–4	–1	17	3	–4	–1	5	–11	49
Greater Manchester	5	5	12	8	–8	–19	25	–6	–3
Hampshire	–1	–8	2	0	–2	12	12	–6	7
Hertfordshire	6	–22	4	18	–5	11	4	–6	–3
Humberside	3	–2	11	14	–3	1	18	–18	18
Kent	21	–6	–2	10	2	1	4	–12	2
Lancashire	7	–2	2	2	3	6	0	4	11
Leicestershire	–6	16	3	1	3	–1	9	1	6
Lincolnshire	3	9	11	5	–3	–24	32	–10	12
City of London	0	–9	4	0	–5	–3	–5	–10	39
Merseyside	–2	7	–6	25	5	7	–16	16	12
Metropolitan police	–5	4	–9	3	3	10	6	–5	–3
Norfolk	–9	12	10	1	11	0	7	–6	6
Northamptonshire	–7	4	8	6	8	–2	3	–13	35
Northumbria	4	8	4	14	–1	4	8	–10	13
North Yorkshire	–8	–9	11	15	–7	5	–10	3	14
Nottinghamshire	4	4	27	–21	–16	–19	22	–4	7
South Yorkshire	–4	2	19	8	7	–5	7	–2	4
Staffordshire	–2	–8	17	8	2	10	9	–7	–4
Suffolk	9	–10	7	–5	4	13	3	1	15
Surrey	–2	–24	–12	8	9	0	5	10	2
Sussex	–1	–7	1	13	–11	6	–2	–16	5
Thames Valley	5	–14	13	9	9	9	4	–5	–12
Warwickshire	–2	–2	11	11	1	2	4	–1	6
West Mercia	–1	–1	14	12	11	–4	4	–5	2
West Midlands	5	–1	10	17	8	–9	1	8	25
West Yorkshire	–27	24	5	11	8	–3	1	–7	9
Wiltshire	–11	4	8	5	7	6	–3	–5	–5
England	–2	2	6	7	1	1	6	–4	6
Dyfed-Powys	–5	–6	6	10	1	19	–2	0	4
Gwent	1	–5	0	19	1	1	13	–13	7
North Wales	–2	–7	8	6	5	–2	–2	–24	43
South Wales	–3	5	9	13	1	0	2	1	3
Wales	–3	–1	7	12	2	2	3	–7	10
Total	–2	2	6	7	1	1	5	–5	6

Police area	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Avon and Somerset	16	–7	10	1	–19	3	15	2
Bedfordshire	31	–10	–14	–7	7	4	–6	–2
Cambridgeshire	–3	21	21	24	–15	–6	–8	–16
Cheshire	17	0	11	–2	–13	–9	11	1
Cleveland	5	2	–17	43	2	–22	–27	26
Cumbria	6	1	4	24	–8	0	–7	7
Derbyshire	–22	10	10	10	–7	–2	–2	–8
Devon and Cornwall	–4	–2	7	8	–35	52	–4	–5
Dorset	0	21	1	27	–22	3	–4	–10
Durham	3	1	–5	9	2	–1	2	–15
Essex	–11	6	13	25	–3	11	5	–17
Gloucestershire	3	–5	11	42	–27	–15	19	3
Greater Manchester	1	3	22	26	2	–10	–10	–32
Hampshire	–7	3	20	7	–1	–5	–1	–1
Hertfordshire	–7	4	–25	37	–18	–19	8	17
Humberside	8	5	21	–3	–21	–23	4	5
Kent	9	–6	–4	26	37	–4	8	–7
Lancashire	13	–26	32	4	0	–3	–12	3
Leicestershire	–5	1	21	–1	12	–4	5	–7

Police area	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Lincolnshire	8	9	15	23	–8	1	–20	19
City of London	13	–12	4	3	–12	–9	15	–6
Merseyside	–9	–7	0	11	–5	–11	–16	–10
Metropolitan police	3	6	7	9	–4	3	20	7
Norfolk	11	8	14	16	–3	–22	7	–17
Northamptonshire	6	–3	3	6	0	–8	8	–9
Northumbria	–6	0	13	–4	–53	10	6	–3
North Yorkshire	3	–5	47	2	–4	–2	–14	–5
Nottinghamshire	9	4	26	–13	7	8	–9	–17
South Yorkshire	1	–1	16	–6	–18	–14	21	–3
Staffordshire	7	1	12	13	–7	–3	0	2
Suffolk	–8	3	12	–1	17	–9	–13	–6
Surrey	–1	3	1	2	3	–9	33	–3
Sussex	–6	14	8	2	7	–6	–2	17
Thames Valley	4	7	–2	6	–5	7	1	0
Warwickshire	6	–2	9	1	8	–8	6	–5
West Mercia	2	–7	41	–7	4	–13	4	–8
West Midlands	4	–11	6	–3	–6	2	–11	–3
West Yorkshire	4	–4	12	3	–6	–28	8	1
Wiltshire	0	31	17	9	–1	–5	–7	–15
England	2	0	11	8	–7	–4	1	–4
Dyfed-Powys	10	–10	14	25	14	–18	–9	–3
Gwent	–7	1	21	13	1	–2	2	–9
North Wales	–7	2	0	6	3	6	–3	–19
South Wales	–1	5	9	–6	8	–7	–18	17
Wales	–2	2	10	3	7	–5	–10	1
Total	2	0	11	7	–6	–5	0	–4

Clear up rates by police force area

Police area	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Avon and Somerset	43	42	39	40	39	38	36	29	30
Bedfordshire	48	44	41	39	39	38	37	29	29
Cambridgeshire	47	55	56	40	40	39	40	37	35
Cheshire	58	59	53	52	51	49	46	43	40
Cleveland	51	45	48	46	45	37	37	34	34
Cumbria	56	47	44	43	44	49	49	42	46
Derbyshire	50	45	49	46	49	54	55	48	45
Devon and Cornwall	46	45	42	45	45	44	46	40	39
Dorset	46	46	40	41	38	40	40	34	36
Durham	52	49	49	45	42	39	45	39	42
Essex	42	43	43	40	41	40	43	37	35
Gloucestershire	51	44	46	42	41	37	35	30	38
Greater Manchester	45	43	41	40	36	27	32	27	27
Hampshire	46	42	38	34	33	35	37	33	34
Hertfordshire	54	46	45	47	49	51	52	46	44
Humberside	45	40	40	41	41	39	40	30	32
Kent	50	47	45	41	42	40	39	34	33
Lancashire	56	55	50	45	47	47	47	45	46
Leicestershire	54	54	50	46	47	44	45	44	45
Lincolnshire	60	59	57	52	49	35	42	36	37
City of London	21	20	20	20	18	18	17	13	19
Merseyside	42	42	34	40	42	41	35	37	43
Metropolitan police	21	20	17	16	17	17	18	16	16
Norfolk	47	46	42	37	41	41	41	36	36
Northamptonshire	48	45	45	41	45	41	39	31	41
Northumbria	53	52	50	49	48	45	46	40	44
North Yorkshire	51	47	44	43	41	38	31	32	34
Nottinghamshire	51	49	55	43	38	30	35	33	34
South Yorkshire	51	47	50	49	49	41	48	43	43
Staffordshire	51	47	49	49	47	48	52	44	42
Suffolk	57	52	51	45	44	47	45	41	45
Surrey	47	39	33	31	34	33	34	34	34
Sussex	53	50	47	45	40	38	36	30	32
Thames Valley	45	39	41	39	41	41	40	35	31
Warwickshire	46	43	40	39	38	36	38	36	34
West Mercia	49	45	44	43	48	45	45	41	42

Clear up rates by police force area

Police area	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
West Midlands	37	33	32	33	36	30	30	29	36
West Yorkshire	37	43	41	42	47	42	42	38	39
Wiltshire	42	43	41	40	43	42	39	36	36
England	41	39	37	36	37	34	35	31	32
Dyfed-Powys	62	58	57	57	57	58	55	51	51
Gwent	60	57	54	57	55	53	55	50	53
North Wales	59	54	51	50	51	46	45	32	43
South Wales	46	45	46	47	47	43	44	39	39
Wales	52	50	49	50	50	47	47	40	43
Total	41	40	38	37	37	35	35	32	33

Clear up rates by police force area

Police area	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Avon and Somerset	36	33	29	24	17	17	21	23
Bedfordshire	39	34	22	19	20	21	22	22
Cambridgeshire	34	38	38	36	27	25	25	19
Cheshire	50	52	50	41	29	26	30	31
Cleveland	37	36	25	33	32	27	19	25
Cumbria	51	49	43	40	37	38	37	40
Derbyshire	38	37	32	28	22	21	21	20
Devon and Cornwall	38	36	32	29	18	25	27	27
Dorset	39	42	35	41	32	33	30	28
Durham	44	42	34	30	30	30	32	30
Essex	32	32	29	32	29	32	36	33
Gloucestershire	39	36	33	35	24	20	24	27
Greater Manchester	29	30	32	36	35	34	34	24
Hampshire	34	32	32	28	26	26	27	28
Hertfordshire	43	44	30	33	26	21	24	28
Humberside	36	35	37	32	23	16	17	19
Kent	36	32	25	23	27	25	29	26
Lancashire	50	40	44	40	37	35	33	34
Leicestershire	43	40	36	29	30	28	30	29
Lincolnshire	42	42	43	46	39	37	32	39
City of London	25	20	21	20	20	22	27	23
Merseyside	45	45	44	45	42	39	33	27
Metropolitan police	17	17	17	17	16	17	22	25
Norfolk	40	40	37	37	34	28	34	31
Northamptonshire	46	43	35	31	30	27	31	28
Northumbria	44	40	40	35	17	20	22	23
North Yorkshire	39	35	40	36	33	30	25	23
Nottinghamshire	38	35	35	27	26	29	28	23
South Yorkshire	47	43	44	36	26	20	24	24
Staffordshire	45	43	39	37	30	29	31	32
Suffolk	44	43	41	37	39	37	35	34
Surrey	34	33	27	23	22	20	30	31
Sussex	30	31	26	23	23	24	24	28
Thames Valley	34	33	26	22	19	21	22	23
Warwickshire	39	35	29	24	23	21	24	25
West Mercia	45	39	46	35	34	29	29	28
West Midlands	42	39	36	31	27	27	25	24
West Yorkshire	43	38	34	28	25	18	20	21
Wiltshire	37	46	44	40	37	35	36	32
England	35	33	31	29	25	25	26	26
Dyfed-Powys	53	52	50	50	53	50	53	57
Gwent	54	54	51	47	44	45	47	50
North Wales	42	44	40	36	33	36	39	32
South Wales	37	39	36	29	30	28	24	29
Wales	42	43	40	35	35	34	32	34
Total	35	34	32	29	26	25	26	26

Car Crime

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private motor vehicles have been stolen and not recovered in the past five years in the United Kingdom. [15181]

Mr. Maclean: The available information relates to recorded offences of theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle and is given in the table. The information given relates to England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the respective Secretaries of State.

Notifiable offences of theft of motor vehicles recorded by the police

England and Wales

Year	*Recorded offences*[1]	*Vehicles recovered*	*Vehicles not recovered*[2]
1991	581,901	372,412	209,489
1992[3]	586,362	363,956	222,406
1993[3]	596,128	350,862	245,266
1994[3]	540,639	315,111	225,258
1995[4]	448,143	283,903	164,240

(1) Includes attempts. Please note that it is not possible to exclude attempts for all forces.

(2) The number of vehicles recovered subtracted from the number of recorded offences.

(3) Excluding Dyfed-Powys.

(4) Excluding Metropolitan Police and Dyfed-Powys.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding delays in obtaining hearings of claims by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; and what is his estimate of the number of unresolved claims which were more than three years old in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* at the latest date for which such figures are available. [15422]

Mr. Maclean: Since 1 January 1996, we have received 15 letters about delays in appeals directly from claimants and 15 through hon. Members. In addition, two hon. Members tabled questions on the subject.

The board advises that data about numbers of outstanding appeals in 1990 are no longer available, but of 26,000 cases currently awaiting oral hearing, 2,067 have been waiting for more than three years.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I increased membership of the board from 43 to 50 in 1996 to help clear the hearings backlog more speedily. Under the new tariff scheme introduced in April 1996, which has a new review procedure and a new independent appeals panel, we expect appeals to be dealt with considerably more quickly than under the superseded scheme.

European Year Against Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-semitism

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken in relation to the European Commission's decision to make 1997 the European Year Against Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-semitism; and if he will make a statement. [15263]

Mr. Kirkhope: The decision to make 1997 the European Year Against Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-semitism was taken by member states of the European Union in July 1996 and is fully supported by the United Kingdom.

I am chairing the national co-ordinating committee for the year in the United Kingdom. The committee met for the first time on 2 December and meets again on 26 February.

The year was launched at European level on 30 and 31 January at a conference in The Hague at which I led the United Kingdom delegation. I shall also be hosting the launch of the year in this country which will take place at Lancaster house on 19 February.

The Government are working closely with the Commission for Racial Equality in the running of the year. The Home Office is providing specific funding to the Commission for Racial Equality to run a helpline and information service. A newsletter has been issued and details of funding available from the European Commission are now being disseminated. We are also in the process of pulling together a calendar of events: this will be sent out shortly and updated periodically throughout the year.

Whitemoor Prison

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the six category A exceptional risk prisoners who escaped from Whitemoor prison in 1994 did not have category A books showing their period at Whitemoor in the special secure unit; and if other prisoners in that unit had such books. [14883]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 12 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Category A books for prisoners in the special secure unit (SSU) at Whitemoor prison.

Category A exceptional risk prisoners held in the SSU in 1994 did not have movement recorded in Category A books because it was judged that, within the discrete area of the SSU, this was unnecessary as it was a small location in which no significant movement was possible.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the nature of the deteriorating health condition of each of the accused in the Whitemoor prison escape trial; what psychiatric and other medical examinations the accused have had since the trial was discontinued; and if he will make a statement. [14884]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 12 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the nature of the deteriorating health condition of each of the accused in the Whitemoor prison escape trial.

For reasons of medical confidentiality, it is not possible to give detailed information on the health of individual prisoners.

All prisoners in special secure units are subject to medical review by the prison medical officer at three monthly intervals. As the prisoners who were charged with escaping from Whitemoor prison are held in special secure units they are subject to these regular medical reviews.

There is no medical evidence that the health of prisoners held in special secure units is being significantly affected by their imprisonment in these units.

Interception of Communications

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) under what statutory basis the police are able to trace the movement of people by reference to their mobile phone records; [14364]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Association of Chief Police Officers and *(b)* mobile phone operating companies, concerning police access to mobile phone records to trace the movement of people; [14365]

(3) what guidelines he has issued concerning police access to mobile phone records; and if he will make it his policy to review the current practice in respect of access to mobile phone records; [14366]

(4) if he will list by police authority the number of applications made by the police for permission to access the United Kingdom Cellnet system; and how many applications have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused; [14629]

(5) which foreign organisations are permitted to receive data obtained from the United Kingdom Cellnet system under existing interception of communication agreements; [14633]

(6) under what circumstances *(a)* the police including special branch, *(b)* the security services and *(c)* the Benefits Agency are allowed access to the national Cellnet system; what are the mechanisms for making and processing such applications; what factors apply in their assessment; who grants access; and what safeguards exist to ensure that information obtained is not misused; [14631]

(7) if he will list by police authority the number of applications made by special branch for permission to access the Cellnet system; and how many applications have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused; [14630]

(8) how many cases have been recorded by his Department where information obtained by accessing the Cellnet system has been used *(a)* in proceedings before the civil and criminal courts and *(b)* in proceedings before statutory and non-statutory tribunals. [14632]

Mr. Howard: The circumstances under which the four mobile telephone operators may disclose personal information which they hold on computer for their own purposes—including for billing, fraud prevention and statistical analysis—are regulated by the Data Protection Act 1984, by the Telecommunications Act 1984, and by the terms of their Telecommunication Act licences which require them to take all reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of customer information. It is an offence, under section 45 of the Telecommunications Act, for an operator to disclose any information concerning subscribers' use of the system except where the disclosure is made for specified purposes including the prevention or detection of crime; for the purposes of any criminal proceedings; in the interests of national security or in pursuance of a court order. All operators are also required to observe a code of practice on the confidentiality of customer information, and they are subject to the normal civil law obligations towards their subscribers.

The police and other agencies concerned with law enforcement and national security may request the operators to provide them with data which they require for one or more of the purposes described above. Additionally, the law enforcement agencies may apply for a court order under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Information concerning the number of such applications which have been made to the operators, and the number of cases in which such information has been used in proceedings before courts and tribunals, is not held centrally.

I see no need to intervene in these arrangements which are properly a matter for the relevant authorities and the operators, within the framework of the safeguards which I have described. Interception of communications—as distinct from the provision of subscriber data—is governed by the Interception of Communications Act 1985 which provides that interception may be carried out only under a warrant issued by the Secretary of State, and that material may be disclosed only in accordance with arrangements made under section 6 of the Act.

Police Escorts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who is responsible for the costs incurred in respect of police escorts of United Kingdom road transportation of nuclear waste cargos; and if he will make a statement. [14370]

Mr. Page: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 22 January 1997, *Official Report*, column *642* in which I explained

"there is no requirement for police escorts to accompany the road transport of radioactive waste."

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Supervisory Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many individuals and firms have been licensed by each of the recognised supervisory bodies created under the Companies Act 1989. [14791]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The table sets out the number of firms currently registered as auditors with each of the recognised supervisory bodies—the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland, the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, and the Association of Authorised Public Accountants—and the number of responsible individuals within those firms:

	ICAEW	*ICAS*	*ICAI*	*ACCA*	*AAPA*
Firms	7,974	650	538	2,866	[1]263
Individuals	16,039	1,154	1,385	4,369	—

[1] All sole practitioners.

Scientific Research and Development

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of gross domestic product in the United Kingdom has been invested in scientific research and development in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [15091]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The figures requested are as follows:

Gross expenditure on scientific Research and Development in the UK

	Percentage of GDP
1990	2.23
1991	2.16
1992	2.18
1993	2.20
1994	2.19

Mr. Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase his Department's budget for science and research development. [15081]

Mr. Taylor: The science budget for 1997–98 announced by the President of the Board of Trade on 28 November will be £18 million above the equivalent allocation for the current year. Information about the Department's other science and technology expenditure will be provided in the expenditure plans report to be published in March.

Cable Entertainment

Mr. Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to lift the prohibition on BT operating in the cable entertainment market; and if he will make a statement. [15090]

Mr. Ian Taylor: BT is not prevented from operating in the cable entertainment market. It is able to do so on the same basis as all other companies, by competing for franchises. BT can even use its existing network within the franchises it holds. It can also deliver on its existing network broadcast television nationally to businesses, and it is free to offer interactive, on-demand services nationally to both businesses and homes. This freedom includes such services as video on demand, with an appropriate licence from the ITC. The only prohibition is on BT using its network nationally to convey or provide broadcast television to homes, as this would give it an overwhelming advantage over cable and other operators that are still building their networks. The Government will review these limited restrictions in 1998 and 2001 for conveyance and provision, respectively, if the Director General of Telecommunications advises that competition continues to become sufficiently established to warrant it. Stability in this regard remains an important factor in underpinning the investment in alternative infrastructure of more than £12 billion which cable and other operators have scheduled for this decade.

Sellafield (Safety)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he was notified of the radiation contamination accidents that took place at Sellafield on *(a)* 2 and *(b)* 4 February; what was the nature of each accident; and if he will make a statement on safety at Sellafield. [15063]

Mr. Page: The incidents were reported to this and other interested Departments and relevant regulatory bodies on 3 and 4 February, respectively.

The incident on 2 February occurred during the dismantling of redundant equipment in the Magnox reprocessing plant at Sellafield. Six workers received slight contamination to their person following the removal of their protective clothing. They were subsequently decontaminated by normal washing/showering and were monitored as clear of contamination before going home. There was no release of radioactivity beyond the Magnox reprocessing plant building where the incident occurred.

The incident on the night of 3/4 February occurred during the transfer of medium active concentrate along a pipeline between storage tanks when some of the liquor spilled onto a tank roof. Heavy overnight rain washed some of this liquor along the installed drainage system and into a large concrete lined pond for the collection of storm water. The pumps which discharge the contaminated water to the sea were stopped automatically as a result of low levels of radioactivity being detected by the installed monitoring equipment. No one received contamination to his or her person or any significant radiation exposure.

The incidents are being fully investigated by British Nuclear Fuels to establish their causes and to make recommendations to prevent a recurrence. Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive's installations inspectorate and the Environment Agency are on site obtaining further information. The NII would not allow any nuclear site to operate if it were not satisfied as to its safety.

In accordance with normal procedures, details of both incidents were contained in last week's Sellafield site newsletter, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Cosmetic Products

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those organisations consulted by his Department on the draft Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996, indicating the date when each meeting took place. [15129]

Mr. John M. Taylor: One hundred and fifty-five organisations and individuals were sent one or both of the consultation documents on the draft cosmetics regulations. A list of these organisations and individuals has been placed in the Library of the House. Representations received, including meetings, are regarded as confidential unless otherwise agreed with the parties concerned.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will amend section 8(3) of the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996 (No. 2925) in 1997 to bring the wording into line with article 7A.1(e) of the Council directive 76/768/EEC as inserted by Council directive 93/35/EEC of 14 June 1993. [15124]

Mr. Taylor: I am advised that regulation 8(3) of the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996 transposes correctly article 7A.1(e) of the cosmetics directive. However, in light of the concerns raised about the interpretation of article 7A.1(e), my officials will be meeting the Commission in order to seek a way in which we can resolve concerns expressed by industry without placing the UK in breach of its Community obligations.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the text of section 8(3) of the draft Cosmetic Product (Safety) Regulations 1996, was based on the text of article 7A.1(e) of the Council directive 76/768/EEC as inserted by Council directive 93/35/EEC of 14 June 1996. [15122]

Mr. Taylor: Draft regulation 8(3), issued for consultation in July 1996, was intended to reflect the meaning of Article 7A.1(e) of the cosmetics directive, but following further consideration, it was decided that correct transposition of the directive required revised wording.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the role of the Royal Society of Chemistry as defined in the annexe to directive 89/48 EEC. [15126]

Mr. Taylor: The Royal Society of Chemistry is listed in the annexe to directive 89/48/EEC. However, article 7A.1(e) of the cosmetics directive 76/768/EEC, as amended, requires that the person responsible for the safety assessment

"must hold a diploma as defined in Article 1 of Directive 89/48/EEC in the field of pharmacy, toxicology, dermatology, medicine or a similar discipline."

My officials will be seeking clarification from the Commission as to what constitutes a similar discipline.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the representations he had received on section 8(3) of the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996 (No. 2925). [15123]

Mr. Taylor: My Department has received representations from five organisations. Representations to the Department from individuals or organisations, on any topic, are treated as confidential unless it is agreed that they can be made public.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to amend the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996 (No. 2925). [15127]

Mr. Taylor: The Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996 implement in the UK the cosmetics directive 76/768/EEC and all subsequent amendments made to it. On average, the cosmetics directive is amended once a year. The Commission has recently amended the directive for the 20th time and we will need to amend the regulations to implement the requirements of that directive by 30 June 1997. The Commission has proposed further amendments to the directive. If, and when, these are agreed, we will amend our regulations accordingly.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations he has received about section 8(3) of the draft Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996. [15125]

Mr. Taylor: Of 51 written responses to the consultation documents issued in October 1995 and July 1996, five commented on regulation 8(3).

Mr. Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what factors led his Department to amend section 8(3) of the draft Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996, following the completion of the consultation process initiated on 30 July 1996. [15121]

Mr. Taylor: On close and detailed examination of the text of article 7A.1(e) of the cosmetics directive 76/768/EEC, as amended, it became clear that draft regulation 8(3) failed to implement the directive correctly.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department sent the Royal Society of Chemistry its consultative note on the proposed new regulations on cosmetic products. [15128]

Mr. Taylor: The Royal Society of Chemistry was not on the mailing list for the draft regulations issued for consultation in July 1996.

Business Links

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list each business link by region, indicating the amount of DTI funding to each for the period 1995–96. [15098]

Mr. Page: Table 1 shows, by region, the pump priming grant for each business link area.

A list of business link services expenditure by business link area could only be provided at disproportionate cost since the information on services grant for each business link is not held centrally and the total services grant for each business link would have to be calculated from local, generally paper-based records of expenditure from each of the services budgets. However, data on expenditure by region are held electronically and table 2 shows expenditure on business support services funded by DTI through training and enterprise councils and business links. These data include expenditure of non-business link services in those areas where the business link had not yet opened in 1995–96.

Table 1: Pump-priming grants for Business Links 1995–96

(£000s)

Area	
Heart of England	211.1
Thames Valley	663.0
Isle of Wight	284.3
Milton Keynes	720.9
Hampshire[1]	0.0
Kent	901.1
Surrey	666.0
Sussex	603.3
South East	4,049.6
BL London	2,966.5
North London	309.5
South London	206.9
West London	382.9
Central London	429.7
London East	329.0

Table 1: Pump-priming grants for Business Links 1995–96
(£000s)

Area	
North West London	124.4
South West London	747.2
City/Inner London	652.3
London	6,148.5
Bedfordshire	614.9
Central and S. Cambridgeshire	357.5
Essex	538.7
Greater Peterborough	579.6
Hertfordshire	819.9
Norfolk	492.1
Suffolk	396.6
Eastern	3,799.3
West (Avon)	1,363.0
Devon and Cornwall	1,948.0
Dorset	287.1
Gloucestershire	508.0
Wiltshire	382.3
Somerset	779.3
South West	5,267.7
Birmingham	594.3
Solihull	397.0
Wyre Forest	276.8
Redditch	314.4
Coventry and Warwickshire	824.0
Dudley	500.4
Hereford and Worcester	194.5
Sandwell	603.4
Shropshire	185.7
Staffordshire	305.3
Walsall	216.5
Wolverhampton	193.2
West Midlands	4,605.5
Greater Nottingham	573.1
Leicestershire	391.4
Lincolnshire	289.3
North Derbyshire	466.1
North Nottinghamshire	256.6
Northamptonshire	207.1
Southern Derbyshire	174.1
East Midlands	2,357.7
Barnsley	135.2
Doncaster	196.6
Bradford	100.0
Calderdale/Kirklees	578.9
Humberside	335.5
Leeds	605.1
North Yorkshire[1]	0.0
Rotherham	216.9
Sheffield	368.2
Wakefield	289.7
Yorkshire and the Humber	2,826.1
Bolton/Bury[1]	0.0
Cumbria	642.1
East Lancashire[1]	0.0
Halton	146.8
High Peak[1]	0.0
Manchester	350.4
Mid Cheshire[1]	0.0
Oldham	257.6
Rochdale	452.1
South and East Cheshire	56.1
Stockport	77.4
Warrington[1]	0.0
West Lancashire[1]	0.0
Wigan	86.5
North west	2,069.0
Wirral and Chester[1]	0.0
Merseyside	1,143.4
St. Helens	233.6
Merseyside	1,377
Durham	535.1
Northumberland	382.9
Teesside	533.8
Tyneside	336.5
Wearside	216.6
North east	2,004.9
BL Support	5,030.8
National total	39,536.1

[1] Pump-priming expenditure began after 1995–96.

Table 2: Expenditure on business support services funded by DTI through TECs and Business Links 1995–96

Region	*£ million*
South East	6.41
London	5.59
Eastern	5.02
South West	4.83
West Midlands	6.06
East Midlands	4.32
Yorkshire and The Humber	2.89
North West	4.60
Merseyside	1.37
North East	2.54
Total	43.63

Ford Factory, Halewood

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state the conditions attached to each Government grant to the Ford factory at Halewood since 1974 indicating whether they were conditional on job creation or job protection and when those conditions were met. [15256]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* Grant payments given under the regional development grants scheme between 1974 and 1987 required the relevant assets to remain in place for a minimum of four years. Payments were not linked to job creation or safeguarding. The scheme provided for recovery of a proportion of the grant where the conditions were not met in full.

Grant payments given under the RDG scheme between 1991 and 1992 were based on set targets for capital expenditure and job creation. The assets were required to remain in place for a minimum of three years and the jobs for 18 months following the completion of the project. The scheme provided for withholding and recovery of grant where these conditions were not met. One project remains within these conditions until 31 December 1997.

Grants given under the RSA scheme were phased over a number of years against targets for capital spend and the creation and safeguarding of jobs. Final payments were made on the satisfactory completion of the projects and were based on the actual capital spend and jobs achieved. From November 1984, assets were required to remain in place for a minimum of three years and the jobs for 18 months following the completion of the project. None of these grants remains within the conditions of the scheme.

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list Government assistance to the Ford factory at Halewood prior to 1974 *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at constant prices. [15257]

Mr. Knight *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* Information about all Government assistance awarded prior to 1974 is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list *(a)* the dates on which Government grants to the Ford factory at Halewood authorised after 1974 were paid and *(b)* the amounts in constant prices using the gross domestic product deflator for 1995–96. [15255]

Mr. Knight *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* Payments made by the Department under the regional development grants and regional selective assistance schemes were as follows:

£000 (1995–96 prices)

	RDGI	*RDGII*	*RSA*	*Total*
1974	188			188
1975	5,816			5,816
1976	7,092			7,092
1977	1,952			1,952
1978	933		66,235	67,168
1979	1,187		20,199	21,386
1980	15,887		4,067	19,954
1981	27,235			27,235
1982	11,618			11,618
1983	7,310			7,310
1984	6,167			6,167
1985	1,680			1,680
1986	12,820			12,820
1987	949		4,154	5,103
1988			1,711	1,711
1989			3,640	3,640
1990			476	475
1991		4,371		4,371
1992		3,657	483	4,141
Total	100,834	8,028	100,965	209,827

Post Office (Privatisation)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department has spent over the last five years on preparation for, and feasibility studies of, Post Office privatisation, indicating the amounts spent on *(a)* contracts with consultants and *(b)* the employment of full-time and part-time staff. [15371]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* The amount spent on consultancy advice between July 1992 and the Government's decision in November 1994 not to proceed with legislation on the Post Office in the current Parliament was £1,613,002.28. The amount spent on full-time and part-time staff working on matters relating to preparation for, or feasibility studies of, Post Office privatisation during this period could be established only at disproportionate cost.

Publicity

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was his Department's expenditure on contractors to provide publicity and news services from centrally managed budgets in each year since 1979–80. [15365]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* For the publicity and news services expenditure for 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) on 11 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *15*.

The expenditure for 1990–91, 1991–92, and 1992–93 is as follows:

	£'000
1990–91	15,820
1991–92	10,203
1992–93	10,117

The figures for previous years are not available.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was his Department's expenditure on staff employed full time or part time to provide *(a)* publicity and *(b)* work on press and media in each year since 1979–80. [15366]

Mr. Taylor *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) on 11 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *15*.

Figures for previous years are not available on a comparable basis.

Biomass Projects

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to *(a)* encourage development work in biomass projects and *(b)* increase the level of their support from the non-fossil fuel obligation. [15374]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* The Government consider that biomass is one of the most promising renewables and has the prospect to contribute to UK energy supplies. In order to secure the electricity generating capacity required by the fourth non-fossil fuel obligation order, NFFO4, announced on 6 February 1997, seven biomass projects with an aggregate capacity of 67.4 MW are expected to be contracted. The value of these contracts is almost twice that of the three biomass projects with an aggregate capacity of 19.1 MW contracted under the third NFFO order, NFFO3, which was made in 1994. The Department of Trade and Industry spent about £2 million in 1995–96 on development work in biomass with matching funding from industry, and the programme is set to continue.

Exports (Yorkshire and Humberside)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the value of exports form the Yorkshire and Humberside region for each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [15484]

Mr. Page: This information is not officially collated on a regional basis and is therefore unavailable.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what use her Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed.[14803]

Mr. Robin Squire: Postcodes are used in the collection and analysis of some DfEE statistics. Grants and awards are distributed mainly at local education authority or local authority level, or to specified organisations. In view of the wide-ranging nature of the DfEE's activities, it would not be possible to provide a full analysis of the use of postcodes without incurring disproportionate costs.

Modern Apprenticeship Scheme

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her latest estimate for *(a)* the annual apprenticeship scheme, *(b)* the number of young people on the scheme and *(c)* the number of employers in the scheme; and if he will list the outcome figures for those who have completed an apprenticeship. [15088]

Mr. Paice: In December 1996, there were around 60,000 young people participating in modern apprenticeships in England. The cost of modern apprenticeships is included within the overall budget for youth programmes in 1996–97 of £763.5 million. The number of participating employers is not available; neither is information on the outcomes of those completing a modern apprenticeship, as the number who have so far completed their training is small.

Education Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list, in real terms, the change of total education standard spending assessments in England for each financial year since 1997–88, indicating also significant structural changes affecting totals. [15093]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows the real-terms change of total education standard spending assessments in England for each financial year since SSAs were introduced in 1990–91. The notes set out the principal changes in local education authorities' financial responsibilities. When allowance is made for these changes, SSAs have increased over this period by 15.6 per cent. in real terms.

Real terms change in education SSAs 1990–91 to 1997–98

	SSA in cash terms £ million	*SSA in real terms £ million (1997–98 prices)*	*Change in real terms £ million*	*Changes in function*
1990–91	14,752.5	18,362.9		
1991–92	17,137.0	20,046.9	1,684.0	
1992–93	18,352.7	20,601.0	554.1	
1993–94	16,530.7	18,034.1	–2,566.9	1
1994–95	16,826.0	18,037.1	3.0	2
1995–96	17,024.1	17,798.7	–238.4	
1996–97	17,764.2	18,119.5	320.8	3
1997–98	17,840.2	17,840.2	–279.3	3

1. Transfer of further education responsibilities from April 1993.
2. Transfer of responsibility for careers guidance and inspection from April 1994.
3. SSAs reduced to reflect phase 1 of the nursery voucher scheme in 1996–97 and phase 2 in 1997–98.

Schools (Essex)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupils in Essex attend (i) grant-maintained schools, (ii) voluntary-aided schools and (iii) local authority schools. [15418]

Mr. Robin Squire: The latest available information is shown in the following table:

Percentage of pupils[1] in grant-maintained, LEA[2] maintained, and voluntary-aided schools in the Essex local education authority area in January 1996

	Grant-maintained	*Voluntary aided*	*Other LEA maintained*
Primary	16.7	10.9	72.4
Secondary	70.8	2.4	26.8

[1] Includes part-time pupils in primary schools.
[2] Schools operating as grant-maintained on the schools' census day January 1996.

Internet

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools which have access to the Internet in each local education authority area; and if she will make a statement. [15274]

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to provide Internet access to all primary and secondary schools; and if she will make a statement. [15273]

Mr. Squire: Government support for the purchase of IT systems, software and networking—including Internet connections—by schools is provided through the school effectiveness grant under the DfEE's programme of grants for education support and training.

The Government are also supporting the evaluation of the educational potential of emerging technologies and models of implementation through their piloting programme, the Education Department's superhighways initiative. Several of these projects pilot the use of the Internet, including Internet services designed specifically

for schools. The results of the pilot projects will be made available later this year along with guidance for schools on purchasing and good practice in the use of new technologies.

Education (Finance)

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) to what percentage of the education standard spending assessment the labour area cost adjustment is applied; and on what basis this percentage is calculated; [15336]

(2) what factors she took into account in her decision to include all salaries in the determination of area cost adjustment for education standard spending assessment. [15338]

Mr. Robin Squire: In calculating the area cost adjustment for education, all the employment groups relevant to the local authority labour market for education are taken into account—not just teachers—since the area cost adjustment seeks to reflect non-teaching as well as teaching costs.

As far as teaching costs are concerned, there is evidence that teachers' salaries, including London weighting payments, do not on their own represent the full additional costs of providing a standard level of service in London and the south-east, since they do not reflect lower levels of experience, higher vacancy and turnover rates, or non-salary payments.

In order to take account of these factors, the area cost adjustment is based on income levels in the general labour market of occupational groups relevant to the local authority labour force. The area cost adjustment for education redistributes some 3 per cent. of the total of education standard spending assessments to authorities in London and the south-east.

Nursery Education

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to ensure that the extension of nursery education to all four-year-olds does not lead to a reduction in places currently available to three-year-olds. [15271]

Mr. Robin Squire: The funding for the nursery education voucher scheme is specifically designed to leave untouched the funding for three-year-olds. Local authorities can continue to spend on such places as they judge appropriate.

Medical Students

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many medical students have begun courses since 1990 in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* England and *(c)* the west midlands. [15176]

Mr. Forth: The available information, which covers full-time entrants to first degree courses only, is as follows:

Number of full-time home domiciled entrants[1] to first degree Medicine/Dentistry

Year of entry	United Kingdom[2]	England[3]	West Midlands[2]
1990–91	4,679	3,526	n/a
1991–92	4,733	3,568	227
1992–93	4,883	3,677	244
1993–94	4,957	3,744	227
1994–95[3]	5,924	4,215	242
1995–96[3]	6,496	4,581	250

Notes:
n/a = not available.
[1] Based on students who were in their first year of study.
[2] Location of institution rather than domicile of student.
[3] Figures collected on a new basis and are not directly comparable with earlier years' figures.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for education and Employment how many medical students have graduated since 1990 in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* England and *(c)* the west midlands. [15177]

Mr. Forth: The available information is as follows:

First degree graduates in medicine/dentistry

Year of graduation	United Kingdom[1]	England[1]	West Midlands[1]
1990	4,388	3,298	210
1991	4,395	3,207	217
1992	4,519	3,327	211
1993	4,572	3,361	218
1994	4,567	3,430	203
1995[2]	5,654	4,199	211
1996[2]	5,631	4,443	226

[1] Location of institution rather than domicile of student.
[2] Figures collected on a new basis and are not directly comparable with earlier years' figures.

Project Work

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many claimants on the project work pilots in Hull and Medway had benefit reductions of (i) two weeks or less and (ii) two to four weeks for failure to attend or complete work placement; and, of these, how many applied *(a)* successfully and *(b)* unsuccessfully for hardship payments. [13591]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Robert Horne to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 12 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked Leigh Lewis to reply to your question about the number of people involved in the Project Work pilots in Hull and Medway who have had their benefit cut and about how many of those have applied for hardship payments. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to Leigh Lewis as Chief Executive of the Agency. I am replying in his absence.

The latest information, up to 31 January 1997, shows that 108 Project Work clients had been sanctioned for a period of 2 weeks and 16 for a period of 4 weeks in the Hull pilot area. Over the same period, in the Medway and Maidstone pilot area, 92 clients were sanctioned for a two week period and 11 for a 4 week period.

These sanctions were given following decisions by adjudication officers that the clients had, without good cause, failed to attend a Project Work place, refused a place, left a place early or lost a place through misconduct.

Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency has agreed to write to you separately on issue on the number of clients who made a claim for a hardship payment.

I hope this is helpful.

School Performance Tables

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to publish the school performance tables of key stage 2 results for 1996 and the estimated cost of their publication. [14300]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 5 February 1997]:* The tables will be published in March, at an estimated cost for data collection and printing of less than 50p per booklet.

Education Bodies (Administration)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the names, salary and other emoluments for each year since 1987–88 for which figures are available of (i) the chief executive and (ii) the chairmen of the *(a)* National Council for Vocational Qualifications, *(b)* National Council for Educational Technology, *(c)* Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, *(d)* Education Assets Board, *(e)* School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *(f)* Further Education Funding Council, *(g)* Higher Education Funding Council for England, *(h)* Funding Agency for Schools and *(i)* Teacher Training Agency. [14514]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The information requested is listed in the following table. Salaries and emoluments for the chairmen of the bodies mentioned have always been publicly available. Chief executives' salaries are negotiated individually on the basis of their responsibilities and for most of the period were confidential. Since 1995–96, following publication of the White Paper on Open Government, this information has been in the public domain.

Year	*Chief Executive*	*Salary and other emoluments*	*Chairman*	*Salary and other emoluments*
(a) National Council for Vocational Qualifications:				
1987–88	Professor Peter Thompson	—	Sir Oscar De Ville	10,000
1988–89	Professor Peter Thompson	—	Sir Oscar De Ville	10,000
1989–90	Professor Peter Thompson	—	Sir Oscar De Ville	10,000
1990–91	Professor Peter Thompson	—	Sir Oscar De Ville/ Sir Bryan Nicholson	12,500
1991–92	Peter Reay/John Hillier	—	Sir Bryan Nicholson	12,500
1992–93	John Hillier	—	Sir Bryan Nicholson	12,500
1993–94	John Hillier	—	Sir Bryan Nicholson/ Sir Michael Heron	14,487
1994–95	John Hillier	—	Sir Michael Heron	17,924
1995–96	John Hillier	79,731	Sir Michael Heron	18,462
(b) National Council for Educational Technology:				
1987–88	Noel Thompson	—	Donald Grattan	5,455
1988–89	Noel Thompson	—	Donald Grattan	5,620
1989–90	Noel Thompson	—	Donald Grattan	6,030
1990–91	Noel Thompson	—	Donald Grattan/ Lady Parkes	Unpaid
1991–92	Noel Thompson	—	Lady Parkes	Unpaid
1992–93	Graham Walters(acting)/ Margaret Bell	—	Gordon Law (acting)/ Jon Richards	Unpaid
1993–94	Margaret Bell	—	Jon Richards	Unpaid
1994–95	Margaret Bell	—	Jon Richards	Unpaid
1995–96	Margaret Bell	70,016	Jon Richards/ Heather Du Quesnay	Unpaid
(c) Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research:				
1987–88	Alan Moys	—	Sir Hugh Byatt	Unpaid
1988–89	Alan Moys	—	Sir Hugh Byatt	Unpaid
1989–90	Alan Moys	—	Sir Hugh Byatt	Unpaid
1990–91	Alan Moys	—	Sir Hugh Byatt — Professor Martin Harris	Unpaid
1991–92	Alan Moys/Dr. Lid King	—	Professor Martin Harris	Unpaid
1992–93	Dr. Lid King	—	Professor Martin Harris	Unpaid
1993–94	Dr. Lid King	—	Professor Martin Harris	Unpaid
1994–95	Dr. Lid King	—	Professor Martin Harris	Unpaid
1995–96	Dr. Lid King	38,423	Professor Martin Harris	Unpaid
(d) Education Assets Board:				
1988–89	Bryan Emmett	—	Sir Tom McDonald	18,200
1989–90	Bryan Emmett	—	Sir Tom McDonald	20,310
1990–91	Bryan Emmett/Stuart Hoare	—	Sir Tom McDonald	20,515
1991–92	Stuart Hoare	—	Sir Tom McDonald	23,365
1992–93	Stuart Hoare	—	Sir Tom McDonald	24,030
1993–94	Stuart Hoare	—	Sir Tom McDonald/Roger Suddards	31,400
1994–95	Stuart Hoare	—	Roger Suddards	32,185
1995–96	Stuart Hoare	59,628	Roger Suddards/Keith Bridge	26,523
(e) School Curriculum and Assessment Authority:				
1993–94	Chris Woodhead	—	Sir Ron Dearing	41,750
1994–95	Chris Woodhead/Dr. Nick Tate	—	Sir Ron Dearing	63,000
1995–96	Dr. Nick Tate	78,740	Sir Ron Dearing	46,670
(f) Further Education Funding Council:				
1992–93	Sir William Stubbs	—	Sir Robert Gunn	33,170
1993–94	Sir William Stubbs	—	Sir Robert Gunn	34,975
1994–95	Sir William Stubbs	—	Sir Robert Gunn	34,975
1995–96	Sir William Stubbs	109,000	Sir Robert Gunn	36,024
(g) Higher Education Funding Council for England:				
1992–93	Professor Graeme Davies	—	Sir Ron Dearing	33,170
1993–94	Professor Graeme Davies	—	Sir Ron Dearing/Brandon Gough	41,120
1994–95	Professor Graeme Davies	—	Brandon Gough	34,974
1995–96	Professor Graeme Davies/Brian Fender	119,000	Brandon Gough	37,080

Year	Chief Executive	Salary and other emoluments	Chairman	Salary and other emoluments
(h) Funding Agency for Schools:				
1994–95	Michael Collier	—	Sir Christopher Benson	34,350
1995–96	Michael Collier	86,000	Sir Christopher Benson	35,210
(i) Teacher Training Agency:				
1994–95	Anthea Millett	—	Geoffrey Parker	15,000
1995–96	Anthea Millett	80,003	Geoffrey Parker	15,000

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Advisers

21. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what subjects he is advised by Mr. John Kennedy and Mr. Perry Miller. [13974]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: None.

Arms Sales (Indonesia)

22. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the United States Government to discuss the sale of arms to Indonesia; and if he will make a statement. [13975]

Mr. Hanley: There has been no recent ministerial discussion of this subject. However, British and US officials keep in regular touch about relations with Indonesia, as with other countries, and issues of defence procurement co-operation sometimes arise.

Artists' Resale Rights

23. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the issues of artists' resale rights and the misuse of article 100(a) of the treaty of Rome by the Commission at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference. [13976]

Mr. David Davis: We have put forward proposals in the intergovernmental conference which are designed to provide safeguards against the misuse of legal bases for Community legislation.

Gibraltar

24. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of Gibraltar. [13977]

Mr. David Davis: Her Majesty's Government stands by its commitment to the people of Gibraltar, enshrined in the 1969 constitution. The Government will not enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. That commitment remains steadfast.

Malta

25. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of Malta's application to join the European Union. [13978]

Mr. David Davis: Malta has suspended its application to join the European Union. But the new Maltese Government have made clear that they want to continue to develop close links with the EU and they are discussing with the European Commission how to take this forward. We welcome this.

Anglo-Russian Relations

26. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet the President of the Russian republic to discuss Anglo-Russian relations; and if he will make a statement. [13979]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has no present plans to meet President Yeltsin. He will meet the Russian Foreign Minister when Mr. Primakov visits London from 27 February to 1 March.

Kashmir

27. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the opportunities for political reconciliation in Kashmir following the recent state elections. [13980]

Dr. Liam Fox: We hope that dialogue between the new Government in Jammu and Kashmir and the Indian Government in New Delhi will lead to an improvement in the situation in Kashmir. I hope to discuss Kashmir during a visit to India and Pakistan later this month.

Bahrain

28. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterpart in Bahrain about the workings of the state security law there; and if he will make a statement. [13981]

Mr. Hanley: We have friendly relations with Bahrain and our frequent discussions cover a wide range of issues. The Government of Bahrain are aware of our view that legal proceedings, including under the security law, should be in accordance with international standards.

National Parliaments

29. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress there has been in the intergovernmental conference as regards the role of national parliaments. [13982]

Mr. David Davis: The draft revision of the treaties submitted by the Irish presidency includes a useful section on national parliaments. Among its proposals are a binding minimum scrutiny period, as proposed by the United Kingdom, as well as an advisory role for the Conference of European Affairs Committees—COSAC.

India and Pakistan

30. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet non-governmental organisations to discuss the political situation in India and Pakistan; and if he will make a statement. [13983]

Dr. Liam Fox: I have occasional meetings with non-governmental organisations and other interested groups and individuals on the political situation in India and Pakistan. I hope to visit both countries again later in the month.

Hong Kong

31. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit China to discuss Hong Kong. [13984]

40. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet Chinese Government Ministers to discuss Hong Kong. [13993]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Members to the oral answer I gave to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) earlier today.

European Union Institutions

32. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what powers he is seeking to have returned to the United Kingdom from European Union institutions during the current intergovernmental conference negotiations. [13985]

Mr. David Davis: The Government have tabled proposals to disapply the working time directive in the UK, and reduce the risk of misuse of existing treaty articles by introducing unanimous voting to article 118a, and parts of article 54 and 57. In addition through their proposals on subsidiarity the Government are seeking to ensure that action is taken at European level only where necessary.

34. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in achieving the Government's objectives in respect of the European institutions in the intergovernmental conference. [13987]

Mr. Davis: Although there have been several discussions of institutional issues in the IGC, the final position of many member states will only be decided in the negotiating endgame. The UK has considerable support for its position on many of these issues.

Zaire

33. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently received regarding the situation in Zaire; and if he will make a statement. [13986]

Dr. Liam Fox: We remain gravely concerned by the situation in eastern Zaire, and remain in close contact with partners in the Security Council, the EU and in the region. We urge all parties to the conflict to call an immediate ceasefire and to enter into negotiations on a peaceful resolution. We welcome the appointment of Mohamed Sahnoun as UNSG's special representative for the Great Lakes. We will give full support to efforts by him and regional leaders, who most recently met in Pretoria on 28 and 29 January, to broker a settlement.

Caribbean Countries

35. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the political stability of Caribbean countries. [13988]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We continuously assess the political stability of all Caribbean countries. We see drugs and drugs-related crime as the main regional threat to stability in the Caribbean and are playing a major role in helping them fight drugs. My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister and President Chirac launched the EU Caribbean drugs initiative in 1995.

Anglo-Korean Relations

36. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom and Korea. [13989]

Mr. Hanley: We have an important political and economic partnership with the Republic of Korea. They work closely with us on the UN Security Council. We have recently welcomed them as a new member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and we are delighted that the UK has attracted over 50 per cent. of Korean investment in Europe.

Western European Union-EU Relations

37. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the relationship between the European Union and the Western European Union with the French and German Foreign Ministers. [13990]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary last discussed these issues with the French Foreign Minister on 8 November 1996 and with the German Foreign Minister on 20 November 1996.

Argentina

38. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Argentina. [13991]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The United Kingdom enjoys excellent relations with Argentina.

World Service

39. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about the future of the BBC World Service. [13992]

Mr. Hanley: None since the beginning of the year.

European Court of Justice

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions the United Kingdom has *(a)* won and *(b)* lost cases before the European Court of Justice in the past 10 years. [13967]

Mr. David Davis: Consolidated figures for the last 10 years are not held in the form requested. However, a recent internal survey of the 125 cases in which the UK

was directly involved or intervened between 1993 and 1995 showed that the court accepted the principle UK submissions in 82 cases or 66 per cent. and wholly rejected them in 24 cases or 19 per cent. The UK has a very creditable record before the ECJ.

United Nations Agencies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently received regarding British funding of United Nations agencies; and if he will make a statement. [13973]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have received no such representations.

Estonia

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on bilateral relations with the Republic of Estonia. [15225]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Our bilateral relations with Estonia are close and friendly, extending across a wide range of areas including political and economic co-operation, trade and investment and defence co-operation. Our close partnership was noted by Estonian Foreign Minister Ilves when he visited the United Kingdom earlier this month and paid tribute to the UK's consistent support for Estonia's sovereignty and independence.

Burma

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Burmese Government's treatment of *(a)* the democracy movement and *(b)* Aung San Suu Kyi. [15392]

Mr. Hanley: We remain deeply concerned by the harassment and detention of many supporters of the democracy movement in Burma and the continuation of road-blocks outside the home of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The EU has adopted a common position in Burma, which urges the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council—SLORC—to allow the National League for Democracy and other legitimate political parties to pursue freely their normal activities.

Antarctica (Rift)

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will call for a report from the commissioner of the British Antarctic Territory on the rift that has appeared in the Larsen B ice shelf; what assessment he has made of the extent to which it indicates changing global temperatures and the possibility of rising sea levels; and if he will make a statement. [15236]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Additional rifts on the Larsen ice shelf have been identified in the past two years. However, the most recent scientific expedition to the area, in November 1996, found nothing extraordinary about these rifts.

The British Antarctic Survey interpretation is that the retreat of ice shelves around the Antarctic peninsula is due to local atmospheric warming. This is not necessarily correlated with temperature trends elsewhere in Antarctica or globally. If local warming continues, it is almost certain that another part of the Larsen ice shelf will disappear.

Since the ice shelf is already floating, and therefore displacing the equivalent of its own mass in water, there would be no rise in sea level even if it were to disintegrate and melt.

Ministerial Visit (France)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to pay an official visit to his counterpart in France to discuss Franco-British developments in the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the expected agenda at this meeting. [14158]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary plans to visit Paris on 3 March when he expects to meet M. Charette, the French Foreign Minister, and to discuss with him European issues as well as other topical matters. He will also deliver a speech on the British vision for the future of the EU.

SCOTLAND

Basking Shark

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received anent the proposal for the designation of the basking shark as an endangered species; and if he will make a statement. [14623]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee has recommended protection of the basking shark by adding it to schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The recommendation, part of a third quinquennial review of schedules 5 and 8 of the 1981 Act, has been presented to the Secretary of State for the Environment on the basis that the species is likely to become endangered unless such protection is implemented. The Scottish Office is participating in the Government's consideration of the recommendations.

The JNCC recommendations are presently the subject of a wide-ranging consultation exercise being carried out by the Department of the Environment. Any representations received will be given full consideration before any decision is taken.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report,* column *373,* when he expects the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise will reply to the hon. Member for North Tayside. [15188]

Mr. Kynoch: I understand that the hon Member's question was answered on 6 February 1997.

Nursery Schools

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* three-year-olds and *(b)* four-year-olds had nursery schools places in each year since 1992. [15007]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested is set out in the table.

Number of pupils attending nursery schools/classes

As at September	Education authority schools		Independent schools	
	Age 3	Age 4	Age 3	Age 4
1992	12,357	33,787	529	996
1993	13,302	33,815	520	923
1994	13,064	35,245	558	968
1995	12,634	35,331	559	947
1996	12,677	36,121	n/a	n/a

The 1996 figures are provisional. The 1996 data are not currently available for independent schools because of a computer malfunction.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many qualified nursery school teachers were employed by each local authority in each year since 1992. [15008]

Mr. Robertson: The numbers of teachers working in education authority nursery schools and classes in the years 1992–96 are set out in the table.

Number of teachers in nursery schools/classes as at September

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Scotland	1,116	1,085	1,135	1,152	1,188
Education Authority					
Aberdeen City	92	86	91	80	—
Aberdeenshire	41	45	45	46	—
Angus	18	18	23	23	—
Argyll and Bute	2	3	4	4	—
Clackmannanshire	16	13	16	16	—
Dumfries and Galloway	24	24	31	30	—
Dundee City	52	47	48	55	—
East Ayrshire	19	17	17	17	—
East Dunbartonshire	3	3	3	3	—
East Lothian	20	30	31	34	—
East Renfrewshire	9	9	9	9	—
Edinburgh, City of	137	140	135	168	—
Falkirk	32	32	36	36	—
Fife	144	117	128	115	—
Glasgow, City of	165	154	156	154	—
Highland	28	26	29	28	—
Inverclyde	13	12	13	12	—
Midlothian	26	29	29	28	—
Moray	24	24	25	26	—
North Ayrshire	8	6	6	6	—
North Lanarkshire	41	40	41	37	—
Orkney Islands	6	8	9	8	—
Perth and Kinross	24	23	27	28	—
Renfrewshire	30	29	29	38	—
Scottish Borders	15	13	14	15	—
Shetland Islands	14	15	15	13	—
South Ayrshire	5	5	5	5	—
South Lanarkshire	19	22	21	21	—
Stirling	21	20	22	20	—
West Dunbartonshire	24	23	24	23	—
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	—
West Lothian	44	52	53	54	—

The 1996 figure is provisional and cannot, at this stage, be disaggregated between authorities.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is currently the average class size for nursery schools for each local authority. [15009]

Mr. Robertson: Information on class sizes in education authority nursery schools is not collected because most nursery provision is not delivered in the context of a class structure.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost to the Scottish Office of the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Selkirk on 3 February; what was the cost of the catering arrangements; and who were the contractors for the catering arrangements. [14678]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The cost of hiring venues, catering, security and so on is borne by the House authorities. Scottish Office officials supporting Ministers in connection with Committee meetings do so as part of their normal duties and no additional staff costs are incurred apart from travelling expenses.

I understand that the cost of the catering arrangements for the Scottish Grand Committee in Selkirk on Monday 3 February is of the order of £750. The caterers used by Scottish Borders council for the meeting were Graylee Jimson Catering.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make arrangements for the food hygiene inspector to be present at the next meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee on 17 February. [14679]

Mr. Forsyth: I see no need for an environmental health officer to be present.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will require that future meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee take place in towns to which there is access by rail. [14680]

Mr. Forsyth: No.

Crime (Clear-up Rates)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the crime clear-up rate and annual percentage change in each year since 1979 in each region; and if he will make a statement; [15014]

(2) what was the clear-up rate for all crimes in Scotland in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987 and *(d)* in each year since 1992 for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [15015]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table. During the period in question, the overall Scottish crime clear-up rate has increased significantly—from 30 per cent. in 1979 to 39 per cent. in 1995. It is expected that further measures such as the provision of additional officers, funding for closed circuit television schemes and enhanced technological support to help the police in solving crime will contribute positively to the continuing fight against crime in Scotland.

Crime clear-up rates (percentages) and annual changes (percentage points) by police force area, 1979–1995

	Central	Dumfries and Galloway	Fife	Grampian	Lothian and Borders	Northern	Strathclyde	Tayside	Scotland
1979									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	37.6	40.4	43.4	37.4	29.3	60.7	25.6	35.0	30.0
1980									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	38.3	39.1	39.7	36.3	34.6	61.1	28.3	37.1	32.6
Change	0.7	–1.3	–3.7	–1.1	5.3	0.4	2.7	2.1	2.6
1981									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	37.8	38.7	38.9	35.9	29.1	57.7	28.0	36.5	31.2
Change	–0.6	–0.4	–0.8	–0.4	–5.5	–3.4	–0.3	–0.6	–1.4
1982									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	36.9	37.8	38.3	31.9	25.1	57.6	27.4	39.2	29.8
Change	–0.9	–0.9	–0.6	–4.0	–4.0	–0.1	–0.6	2.7	–1.4
1983									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	40.4	39.2	40.6	33.8	25.2	59.0	28.4	42.5	30.9
Change	3.5	1.4	2.3	1.8	0.2	1.4	1.0	3.3	1.1
1984									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	39.9	44.7	38.1	35.1	27.4	58.1	27.4	41.0	30.8
Change	–0.5	5.5	–2.5	1.3	2.2	–0.9	–1.0	–1.6	–0.1
1985									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	44.1	46.8	40.6	34.5	33.2	62.5	28.9	44.1	33.6
Change	4.2	2.1	2.5	–0.5	5.8	4.4	1.5	3.1	2.8
1986									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	47.6	54.3	41.5	31.3	38.2	62.4	28.4	41.0	34.2
Change	3.5	7.5	0.9	–3.2	5.0	–0.1	–0.4	–3.1	0.6
1987									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	48.8	53.8	41.8	31.5	38.9	62.9	29.3	42.7	34.9
Change	1.2	–0.5	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.5	0.8	1.7	0.7
1988									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	48.2	51.0	39.8	33.9	38.4	65.4	28.0	42.4	34.0
Change	–0.5	–2.8	–2.0	2.4	–0.5	2.5	–1.3	–0.3	–0.9
1989									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	47.0	50.6	38.5	35.3	38.5	61.4	27.5	40.7	33.4
Change	–1.2	–0.3	–1.3	1.4	0.2	–4.0	–0.5	–1.6	–0.6
1990									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	46.1	42.7	36.2	33.0	35.1	61.8	26.7	41.4	32.1
Change	–0.9	–8.0	–2.3	–2.3	–3.4	0.4	–0.9	0.6	–1.3
1991									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	44.7	45.0	32.9	32.4	33.9	59.2	26.1	38.2	31.1
Change	–1.4	2.4	–3.3	–0.7	–1.2	–2.7	–0.6	–3.1	–1.0
1992									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	56.0	40.7	32.7	31.1	34.4	56.9	28.0	37.5	32.[illegible]
Change	11.3	–4.3	–0.2	–1.3	0.5	–2.3	1.9	–0.8	1.2
1993									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	55.4	46.1	38.2	32.6	36.5	56.8	30.6	32.5	34.3
Change	–0.5	5.4	5.5	1.5	2.2	–0.2	2.6	–5.0	2.0
1994									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	57.0	48.1	42.4	34.3	37.4	59.2	33.9	37.1	37.1
Change	1.6	2.0	4.2	1.7	0.9	2.5	3.3	4.6	2.8
1995									
Clear-up rate (percentage)	61.2	57.4	48.1	35.9	38.2	65.8	34.6	38.6	38.8
Change	4.2	9.3	5.8	1.7	0.8	6.6	0.7	1.5	1.7

Song Birds

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the consequences for the numbers and varieties of song birds of the range of arable incentive schemes proposed by his Department. [14676]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The rules of the arable area payments scheme have always encouraged arable farmers to maximise environmental benefits on their set-aside land and further changes announced last year will be of additional benefit. Furthermore, the environmentally sensitive area scheme, and forthcoming countryside premium scheme, contain prescriptions and measures directly aimed at conserving, improving or providing particular habitats which will increase the areas of cover, feeding and nesting sites for a wide range of bird species including song birds.

Crime Prevention Budget (Prisons)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the current crime prevention budget has been allocated to projects in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [15109]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No part of the Scottish Office's current crime prevention budget is used for projects in prisons since the costs of programmes which address the offending behaviour of prisoners are met from the prison service budget. A significant part of the crime prevention budget has, however, been allocated to two projects designed to prevent re-offending by persistent young offenders.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to modify the rules,

regulations and guidelines concerning the use of electro-convulsive therapy in the treatment of patients suffering from mental illness; and if he will make a statement. [15110]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend proposes to consult very soon on the Scottish Law Commission's report on incapable adults, which includes recommendations relating to the use of electro-convulsive therapy. A copy of the consultation paper will be placed in the Library when published.

AIDS (Prisoners)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* male prisoners and *(b)* female prisoners (i) are HIV positive and (ii) have AIDS; and if he will make a statement. [15111]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 12 February 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question about the number of prisoners in Scotland who are HIV positive or have AIDS.

Prisoners are encouraged to undergo testing for transmissible diseases on a voluntary basis. The results are confidential to prison medical staff and individual prisoners and are not collated centrally. Independent research surveys have been commissioned, however, to estimate the prevalence of HIV among prisoners. Eleven surveys were carried out in 8 establishments between 1991 and 1996, conducted by Drs Graham Bird and Sheila Gore. Prisoners gave a saliva sample and completed a questionnaire, on a voluntary and anonymous basis. Although HIV is not found in saliva, the tests can identify antibodies which the body makes against the virus. The results are given in the following table. Cornton Vale holds female prisoners.

Results of voluntary anonymous screening of prisoners for HIV+

Year	*Establishment*	*Number of prisoners tested*	*Number of prisoners HIV+*
1991	HMP Edinburgh	363	17 (5 per cent.)
1992	HMP Edinburgh	236	8 (3 per cent.)
	HM YOI Polmont	421	0 (0 per cent.)
1993	HMP Glenochil	227	12 (3 per cent.)
1994	HMP Glenochil	296	7 (2 per cent.)
	HM YOI Glenochil	162	0 (0 per cent.)
	HMP Barlinnie	978	10 (1 per cent.)
1995	HMP Perth	304	6 (2 per cent.)
	HMP and YOI Cornton Vale	136	0 (0 per cent.)
1996	HMP Low Moss	293	2 (1 per cent.)
	HMP Aberdeen	157	2 (2 per cent.)

Farms (Negative Equity)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time farm businesses were in a negative equity position in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement. [12755]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* The table presents the percentage of farms in the farm accounts survey in Scotland that had liabilities exceeding business assets. The information is available only from 1986–87 onwards.

Year	*Percentage of farms surveyed in FAS with negative equity*
1996–97	0.2
1995–96	0.4
1994–95	0.7
1993–94	0.4
1992–93	0.8
1991–92	0.7
1990–91	0.3
1989–90	0.5
1988–89	1.1
1987–88	1.2
1986–87	1.9

Local Enterprise Companies (Training)

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what ways the eligibility, financial and operating rules which apply to the delivery of training programmes by LECs in 1997–98 will differ from the rules outlined in the new contracting documents which replace the training and enterprise councils annual funding agreement in England. [13593]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The rules in England are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The rules for Government training programmes in Scotland are contained in the management statements and manual of project and programme rules of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library. Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have responsibility for the delivery of Government training programmes through their respective networks of local enterprise companies. The contents of the annual operating contracts which exist between these enterprise organisations and the individual local enterprise companies within their networks are a matter for the enterprise organisations.

Northern Isles (Ferry Services)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what date final tender proposals have to be submitted to his Department in respect of the provision of passenger ferry services for the Northern Isles. [14872]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* The shipping operators who are competing for the award of subsidy under the new block grant arrangements for the support of passenger ferry services to the Northern Isles have been asked to submit their tenders by Monday 24 February 1997.

Northern and Western Isles (Freight Services)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to issue a consultation paper on the future subsidy arrangements for the carriage of bulk freight to the Northern and Western Isles; and if he will make a statement. [14873]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* A consultation paper on bulk freight shipping services in the highlands and islands area was issued on Friday 7 February 1997. Responses have been invited by Friday 19 April.

Departmental Staff

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff his Department employs to advise schools on attaining self-governing status; and what is their current salary. [15172]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 1 February 1997]:* Self-governing schools matters are dealt with by four officials within a policy branch of the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department which also deals with a range of other matters, including registration of, and liaison with, independent schools, the administration of the assisted places scheme, and school transport. Other officials, including Her Majesty's inspectors of schools and those dealing with legal and financial issues, also have occasional involvement on such matters when the need arises. It is not Scottish Office policy to disclose the salaries of individual officials.

WALES

Farms (Negative Equity)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time farm businesses had a negative equity in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement. [12756]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 28 January 1997]:* Results of the farm business survey show only isolated incidences of farm businesses in the sample with negative equity—defined as liabilities greater than assets—since 1986–87, the first year for which information is readily available.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many full-time farm businesses in Wales had negative equity in each year since 1985. [13894]

Mr. Evans: Results of the farm business survey show only isolated incidences of farm businesses in the sample with negative equity—defined as liabilities greater than assets—since 1986–87, the first year for which information is readily available.

Public Information Videos

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many public information videos produced by his Department and the agencies for which he is responsible have been subtitled or signed. [14382]

Mr. Hague: In the past five years, no public information videos produced by my Department or agency Cadw have been subtitled or signed.

Economic Activity

Mr. Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he plans to make to his policy to redress the imbalance in economic activity and inward investment between south-east Wales and south-west Wales. [14422]

Mr. Hague: I would like to see more investment in the western parts of Wales and in those other areas that have so far not been the principal beneficiaries of inward investment.

I will therefore set the Welsh Development Agency new and more demanding targets for inward investment outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors. Additionally, I am asking the WDA, within agreed UK and European limits, to recognise the extra costs of locating in some areas by being prepared to give more assistance to companies locating in those areas than to equivalent projects elsewhere.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on current hospital waiting times in *(a)* Clwyd and *(b)* Powys. [14889]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Since 1 April 1996, the residents of Clwyd are the responsibility of North Wales health authority and the residents of Powys are the responsibility of Dyfed Powys health authority.

At 30 September 1996, 95 per cent. of north Wales residents and 93 per cent. of Dyfed Powys residents who were waiting for a first out-patient appointment had been waiting less than six months. In both areas, 99 per cent. of those waiting for in-patient or day-case treatment had waited less than 18 months and no one had waited over two years.

Maternity Beds

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of maternity beds provided by each *(a)* NHS and *(b)* non-NHS hospital in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [14893]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A list of NHS hospitals in Wales providing maternity beds is given in the following table. There are no specifically designated maternity beds in private hospitals in Wales.

NHS Hospital	*Average daily number of maternity beds 1995–96*[1]
Aberdare General	4
Breconshire War Memorial	6
Broddyfi Community	2
Bronglais General	16
Bryn Beryl	5
Builth Wells Cottage	3
Caerphilly District Miners	23
Chirk Community	3
Deeside Community	3
Dolgellau and Barmouth	6
East Glamorgan General	40
Knighton	2
Llandough	50
Llandrindod Wells	4
Llanidloes and District	3
Montgomeryshire County Infirmary	4
Neath General	27
Nevill Hall	31
Prince Charles	41
Princess of Wales	38

NHS Hospital	Average daily number of maternity beds 1995–96[1]
Royal Gwent	68
Singleton	68
Tywyn and District War Memorial	2
University Hospital of Wales	40
Victoria Memorial	8
West Wales General	32
Withybush General	40
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	48
Ysbyty Gwynedd	43
Ysbyty Maelor	53

[1] Obstetrics and GP maternity. Provisional.

Music Lessons

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines his Department has issued to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* schools in Wales regarding making music lessons available to pupils without consideration of parental payment; and if he will make a statement. [14780]

Mr. Hague: Welsh Office circular No. 4/89, "Charges for School Activities", a copy of which is in the Library, gives guidance on charges for individual tuition in playing a musical instrument unless the tuition was necessary as part of the syllabus for a prescribed public examination or of the national curriculum, when it must be provided free of charge. Amending legislation in 1993 subsequently extended charges to groups of up to four pupils.

Hospital Services

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS hospitals in *(a)* Clywd and *(b)* Powys are currently paying private sector hospitals to treat NHS patients; if he will list the (i) hospitals concerned and (ii) costs involved; and if he will make a statement. [14892]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am advised that no NHS trusts based in the former county of Clwyd or in Powys are currently paying private sector hospitals to treat NHS patients.

Roads

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* road building and *(b)* road repairing work planned to take place during 1997, and for each the (i) start date, (ii) planned completion date and (iii) cost; if he will identify those where the construction of a flyover is involved; and if he will make a statement. [14915]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Our spending plans for roads in 1997–98 were announced by my right hon. Friend on 12 December 1996. All major schemes in the forward trunk road programme are being reviewed in the light of that announcement. We are reassessing the competing priorities of individual schemes in the programme against the resources available. Details of the revised forward trunk road programme will be published in the Welsh Office departmental report shortly. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library of the House.

Asthma

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are currently being treated for asthma in *(a)* each county and *(b)* Wales; and if he will make a statement. [14888]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of people treated for asthma in Wales is not available centrally. However, a health survey of adults was carried out in Wales during 1995 and one of the questions asked was "Do you have any of these chest troubles or breathing difficulties now?"—asthma was one of the conditions included. The results, by health authority, were published in chapter 1 of "Welsh Health Survey 1995", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homeless households there are in each of the local authority areas in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [15140]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on the number of households accepted by local authorities as homeless is provided in the following table:

Number of households accepted as homeless, July to September 1996

Authority	Number
Blaenau Gwent	59
Bridgend	365
Caerphilly	113
Cardiff	342
Carmarthenshire	71
Ceredigion	35
Conwy	57
Denbighshire	45
Flintshire	56
Gwynedd	28
Isle of Anglesey	25
Merthyr Tydfil	35
Monmouthshire	31
Neath Port Talbot	129
Newport	172
Pembrokeshire	65
Powys	111
Rhondda Cynon Taff	204
Swansea	310
Torfaen	60
The Vale of Glamorgan	38
Wrexham	109
Wales	2,460

Source:
Local authority returns.

Unfit Homes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses in *(a)* the Alyn and Deeside constituency and *(b)* Wales his Department estimates to be unfit for human habitation. [15145]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The latest Welsh house condition survey was conducted in 1993. From this, it is estimated that 151,200 occupied first homes in Wales were unfit. Information on individual constituency or local authority areas is not available from the survey. A

further house condition survey, which will provide results for local authority areas, is under way. Information from this survey will be available in 1998.

Housebuilding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the level of housebuilding in Wales. [15144]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Provisional data available from local authorities and the National House Building Council on house building in Wales for the third quarter of 1996 show 2,543 dwellings were started and 2,227 were completed during the period. This represents a 12 per cent. increase in the number of starts and a 2 per cent. increase in the number of completions over the third quarter of 1995.

Planning Guidance

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received since the publication of "Technical Advice Note (Wales) 5"; how many expressed continuing concerns; and what those concerns were. [15241]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has received no representations on "Technical Advice Note (Wales) 5" since its publication.

European Anti-racism Year

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he has taken in relation to the European Commission's decision to make 1997 the European Year Against Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-semitism; and if he will make a statement. [15264]

Mr. Hague: The Home Office has established a national co-ordinating committee which brings together representatives from a range of key organisations from across the country and will act as a focal point for the UK contributions to the European Year. The committee is currently drawing up a national programme of events for the Year and details will be announced in due course.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Recipients

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *190*, how many recipients of council tax benefit were *(a)* retirement pensioners and *(b)* retirement pensioners also receiving income support; what estimates he has made of the numbers of retirement pensioners drawing council tax benefit who are eligible for, but not claiming income support in (i) Great Britain, (ii) the United Kingdom and (iii) Bristol, East. [14292]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

Number of council tax benefit recipients in receipt of the state retirement pension for Great Britain as at the end of May 1995.

	Number of recipients (000s)
All recipients of council tax benefit and retirement pension.	2,431
All recipients of council tax benefit, retirement pension and income support.	1,100
Estimated recipients of council tax benefit and retirement pension, eligible for but not claiming income support	260

Notes:
1. The information applies only to Great Britain.
2. Information on Bristol East is not available.
3. The first two figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand. The estimated figure has been rounded to the nearest 10,000.
4. Figures refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.

Source:
1. Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample enquiry of housing benefit recipients with and without income support for Great Britain taken at the end of May 1995.

For information on Northern Ireland I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and Learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14802]

Mr. Burt: Postcodes are used as one of the eligibility criteria for determining entitlement to a social fund cold weather payment. Each residential postcode is linked to one of 70 representative weather stations within Great Britain. The use of postcodes was introduced in November 1991. This enables those eligible for a payment to be identified quickly and a payment issued. After the end of each winter the scheme is reviewed. The review includes postcode to weather station links.

The family resources survey, which is sponsored by this Department, uses the Office for National Statistics small users postcode address file to select a representative sample of households in Great Britain. The sample selection is carried out by the Office for National Statistics. There has not been a comprehensive review of the usage of postcodes since the survey was launched in 1992, but the coverage achieved by the selection method is under constant surveillance.

The War Pensions Agency, in the annual report, "Pensioners by War Pension Committee Regions", shows the number of pensioners resident in specified war pension committee areas, which are broken down by postcode. The report is produced by the war pensions computer system. The method of compiling the report was last reviewed in June 1996.

The Child Support Agency uses postcodes to estimate broadly travel to work allowances which may form part of a maintenance assessment. The agency began using postcodes for this purpose following the introduction of child support legislation in April 1995, which allowed

parents to have such costs reflected in their maintenance assessment. There has been no review of the usage of postcodes since that date.

Social Security Appeals

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what targets exist for the Benefits Agency staff involved in adjudication and appeals of social security claims regarding appeal processing; [15220]

(2) to what extent the pay of Benefits Agency staff involved in adjudication and appeals of social security claims is related to targets on appeals processing. [15221]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of Social Security benefits is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 11 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking what targets exist for the Benefits Agency (BA) staff involved in adjudication and appeals of social security claims regarding appeal processing; and to what extent the pay of BA staff involved in adjudication and appeals of social security claims are related to targets on appeals processing.

The information is not available in the format requested. Responsibility for the overall clearance of appeals is for the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS).

National targets set by the BA for appeals processing relate to the period between receipt of an appeal by BA and the despatch of the submission to ITS. Once despatched, further action on the appeal is the responsibility of the ITS. Each individual benefit contributes towards these national targets and have their own targets for clearing claims to the ITS. The targets set for BA are shown in the attached Annex.

The pay of all Benefits Agency staff is performance related. The amount each receives depends on the achievement of a set personal key work objectives, and annual appraisal of performance.

Staff involved in adjudication and appeals processing would have key work objectives which support the achievement of those targets. The achievement of key work objectives informs the overall performance marking for individual staff which in turn determines annual performance pay awards.

I hope that you find this information useful.

The national targets set for the 3 types of appeal administered by BA are as follows:

Type of appeal	*Primary target Per cent.*	*Secondary target Per cent.*
Social Security	69 in 28 days	94 in 90 days
Medical	60 in 35 days	85 in 60 days
Disability	60 in 30 days	90 in 60 days

The individual benefit targets are as follows:

Benefit	*Primary target Per cent.*	*Secondary target Per cent.*
Income Support and Contributory Benefits	70 in 28 days	95 in 90 days
Job Seekers Allowance	70 in 28 days	95 in 90 days
Family Credit	69 in 28 days	94 in 90 days
Disability Living Allowance	69 in 28 days	94 in 90 days
Attendance Allowance	69 in 28 days	94 in 90 days
Disability Working Allowance	69 in 28 days	94 in 90 days
Invalid Care Allowance	61 in 28 days	93 in 90 days
Child Benefit	50 in 28 days	90 in 90 days
Guardians Allowance	93 in 28 days	—
Pension Services Division	64 in 28 days	94 in 90 days
Overseas Benefits Division	51 in 28 days	90 in 90 days

Disability Appeals	*Primary target Per cent.*	*Secondary target Per cent.*
Disability Living Allowance	60 in 30 days	90 in 60 days
Attendance Allowance	60 in 30 days	90 in 60 days

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what further studies he has made to measure the amount of benefit fraud; and if he will make a statement. [15901]

Mr. Burt: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, announced in July 1995 that he had instigated a series of benefit reviews across the major social security benefits to identify and quantify the level of fraud and error. Results of the reviews of income support, unemployment benefit, housing benefit, retirement pension and invalid care allowance have already been announced.

A review has now been completed on disability living allowance, a benefit which is paid to disabled people to help with some of the extra costs associated with disability. Not all disabled people satisfy the conditions for an award of DLA, which is based on the care and mobility needs arising from the effects of a disability rather than on the disability itself.

The review shows that some 73 per cent. of customers are entitled to the DLA they are receiving. In 27 per cent. of cases, therefore, DLA is being paid at an incorrect rate. Reasons for incorrectness, which involved both underpayments and overpayments of DLA, ranged from departmental or customer error right through to deliberate fraud.

In 12.2 per cent. of the cases surveyed, officials considered that customers did not satisfy the qualifying condition for receipt of either all or part of the benefit in payment due to their deliberate overestimate of their care or mobility needs or failure to report an improvement in their condition. Grossed up from the sample this represents an estimated annual overpayment of £499 million.

In addition there was a further 3 per cent. of customers who were found by the review to have been overpaid but where they might have been unaware that the changes in their condition was such that they should have reported it to the Benefits Agency. These represent an estimated annual overpayment of £83 million.

The exercise also identified another 9.3 per cent. of customers who were not receiving the appropriate rate of benefit because of an unreported deterioration in their condition. This represents an estimated annual underpayment of £227 million.

The results of this exercise will be studied and will help to inform plans to tackle incorrectness in DLA.

Customers who are entitled to the benefit have nothing to worry about from the findings of this exercise. But there are changes in medical conditions which can affect that entitlement level. The nature of some disabilities is such that there can be improvements where care or mobility needs, or both, become slight or non-existent. Customers have a duty to report such subsequent changes in their condition to the Benefits Agency and this requirement is clearly set out to customers when they receive benefit.

Elderly People (Winter Assistance)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he has taken to help the elderly during the winter months in each of the last three years; and at what cost. [15385]

Mr. Roger Evans: During the last three years, help has been available to pensioners awarded income support through the social fund cold weather payments scheme. This gives help towards additional heating costs during sustained periods of very cold weather. Estimates of benefit expenditure for each of the last three years are as follows:

£000

Year	*Total cold weather payments expenditure*	*Estimated expenditure to pensioners*
1993–94	12,400	6,374[1]
1994–95	77	39[1]
1995–96	61,600	31,108[1]

[1] Estimated expenditure figures for pensioners are based on the income support quarterly statistical enquiry at February 1994, 1995, and 1996. Families with children under five, disabled people and pensioners on income support were eligible for cold weather payments. Expenditure on pensioners has been estimated on a pro rata basis.
Expenditure figures rounded to nearest £1,000.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Civil Service Briefings

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to offer to hon. Members briefings by the Northern Ireland civil service similar to those provided for the Anglo-Irish Secretariat on appropriate topics. [12173]

Sir John Wheeler: Briefings are provided for the Irish side of the Anglo-Irish secretariat, in accordance with the terms of the Anglo-Irish agreement, on appropriate matters. These briefings can be instigated by either side.

My ministerial colleagues and I also offer briefings to hon. Members on occasions but, in addition, always stand ready to consider favourably requests from hon. Members on issues relevant to the Northern Ireland Departments.

Gallaher Ltd.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from which budget the award of £9.957 million to Gallaher Ltd. towards development at its Ballymena factory was made. [15182]

Mr. Ancram: The selective financial assistance offered to Gallaher Ltd. for development at the Ballymena factory will be payable from the Northern Ireland block, Department of Economic Development vote 1 section D (Assistance to Industry).

Job Skills Programmes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what requests he has received from the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action to discuss matters relating to the use of European Union funding for mainstream job skills programmes and related programmes; and if he will make a statement. [14910]

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. and learned Friend has not been asked by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action for a meeting to discuss these matters.

EU Funding

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to modify his proposals for the mainstreaming of current temporary funding schemes from European Union programmes, with particular reference to the special support programme for peace and reconciliation and the European social fund; and if he will make a statement. [14906]

Sir John Wheeler: All projects developed under the special support programme for peace and reconciliation and the community initiatives component of the European social fund will be evaluated in due course to see what lessons may be learned. Apart from this, there are no such plans.

Training and Employment

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what has been the change in the funding of the action for community employment scheme in the past 12 months; what further changes are planned in the near-future; and if he will make a statement; [14907]

(2) what recent representations he has received concerning the role of the voluntary sector in reducing unemployment; and if he will make a statement; [14908]

(3) if he has received the report of the review of long-term unemployment conducted by the Training and Employment Agency; and if he will make a statement. [14909]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 12 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, to reply to your questions about the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme, the role of the voluntary sector and long-term unemployment.

14907

Resources allocated to ACE have been reduced in each of the last two public expenditure rounds. In the 1995–96 financial year £49.6 million was spent providing, on average, 9,189 ACE places. This year £39.8 million has been allocated to provide, on average, 7,200 places. In 1997–98 and the following two years ACE has

been allocated £28.5 million which will support around 5,200 places. There are no plans to make further changes to ACE. Any such plans will only emerge following extensive consultation on the Training and Employment Agency's review of long-term unemployment which will be published shortly.

14908

The Agency has frequent discussions with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) which is the body most representative of voluntary sector organisations working with the unemployed. NICVA has provided very constructive advice, along with other organisations in the voluntary sector, on the preparation of the Agency's consultation document on long-term unemployment.

The consultation document is intended to stimulate an informed and forward looking debate on the types of approaches and measures which might most effectively help the long-term unemployed to reintegrate into the active labour market. It will examine the roles which different sectors, including the voluntary sector, might play within the overall strategy.

14909

Baroness Denton has received a copy of the draft consultation document which the Agency expects to complete and publish shortly.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Fee-paying Schools

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the fee-paying schools which have received funds under *(a)* the targeting social needs scheme and *(b)* the raising school standards initiative, indicating the amounts received in each of the past three years and the sums forecast to be paid in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [15108]

Mr. Ancram: Fees in Northern Ireland's voluntary grammar schools are, with two exceptions, limited to a maximum capital fee of £80. All voluntary grammar schools receive some level of assistance from targeting social needs resources, on the principle that money follows the pupils eligible for free school meals. The amount going to voluntary grammar schools represents only 4 per cent. of the funds allocated under the scheme.

The table lists the sums received by each voluntary grammar school.

School	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £	*1997–98* £
Armagh Royal	6,790	8,849	5,871	4,422
Ballymena Academy	8,692	7,421	5,284	7,076
Ballymoney Dalriada	13,581	13,987	12,036	12,972
Bangor Grammar	6,519	5,423	4,697	5,012
Belfast Bloomfield	6,519	8,849	6,752	6,781
Belfast Campbell	1,358	856	2,055	3,243
Belfast High	12,223	11,132	10,862	14,446
Belfast Hunterhouse	8,148	10,276	11,742	11,793
Belfast Methodist	8,148	10,276	9,100	12,972
Belfast RBAI	8,148	8,563	5,871	6,191
Belfast Royal Academy	15,482	15,414	19,081	16,510
Belfast Strathearn	3,803	3,996	3,816	5,307
Belfast Victoria	4,074	5,423	7,339	9,434
Coleraine Acad Inst	14,396	12,274	12,623	13,856
Dungannon Royal	5,976	8,278	12,330	10,024
Enniskillen Portora	4,074	5,709	7,045	4,717
Holywood Sullivan	2,716	2,569	1,761	2,948
Larne Grammar	7,062	5,423	4,697	6,486
Lisburn Friend's	5,704	6,851	7,633	6,781
Lisburn Wallace	4,889	6,565	9,394	9,729
Londonderry Foyle	20,099	19,695	18,201	21,227
Magherafelt Rainey Endowed	13,309	13,416	13,504	19,163
Armagh St. Patrick's	27,976	32,255	34,053	34,788
Ballymena St. Louis'	25,532	24,548	32,585	24,764
Ballynahinch Assumption	16,840	13,701	17,907	23,585
Belfast Acquinas	6,519	11,988	19,081	21,227
Belfast CBS	74,966	87,059	90,417	85,201
Belfast Dominican	30,149	35,395	34,053	32,724
Belfast Our Lady and St. Pats	21,186	22,264	25,540	21,521
Belfast St. Dominic's	45,360	68,220	67,813	58,078
Belfast St. Malachy's	24,989	33,111	34,640	34,198
Coleraine Loreto College	29,063	31,113	30,530	29,481
Donaghmore St. Joseph's	35,582	36,822	39,044	44,517
Downpatrick St. Patrick's	15,754	13,987	16,146	17,689
Dungannon St. Patrick's Boys'	61,113	59,942	62,529	68,387
Dungannon St. Patrick's Girls'	57,311	59,942	58,419	60,732
Dunmurry Rathmore	18,741	25,119	25,833	20,637
Enniskillen Convent	46,446	52,806	46,838	50,118
Eniskillen St. Michael's	38,026	38,820	36,695	37,147
Garron Tower	23,630	21,693	26,714	25,059
Kilkeel St. Louis'	19,013	19,981	23,191	29,481
Londonderry St. Columbl	20,869	111,036	113,021	114,682
Londonderry Thornhill	90,719	91,912	95,701	98,468
Lurgan St. Michael's	28,248	25,975	23,485	28,007
Magherafelt St. Mary's	49,162	48,525	55,189	58,963
Newry CBS	33,680	42,245	40,218	40,979
Newry Our Lady's	45,903	53,092	48,731	50,118
Newry Sacred Heart	37,211	41,674	49,905	47,170
Newery St. Colman's	28,520	31,113	31,998	33,609
Omagh CBS	28,791	33,682	36,695	39,210
Omagh Loreto	36,125	42,245	45,502	45,106
Portstewart Dominican	6,519	7,992	9,394	9,434
Strabane Convent	36,396	32,826	33,760	37,441
	1,342,049	1,442,328	1,496,866	1,533,621

(b) No fee-paying school receives any assistance under the Raising School Standards Initiative.

Bloody Sunday

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received from the Taoiseach concerning Bloody Sunday; and if he will make a statement. [15258]

Sir John Wheeler: None. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke to the Taoiseach on Friday 31 January; Bloody Sunday was among the many items discussed. The subject was also raised when my right hon. and learned Friend met the Tanaiste on Thursday 6 February.

Corrigendum

Official Report, 3 February 1997: In col. *458–59,* written answers, the question and answer relating to the new parliamentary building should read as follows:

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee when construction of the new parliamentary building will commence; and if he will make a statement. [11925]

Sir Raymond Powell: I am pleased to report that good progress is being made with the design and procurement of the new building. Contracts for over 70 per cent. of the work by value have been awarded. For example, prefabrication of the roof is proceeding apace in

Lancashire, of the stone columns in Derbyshire and the contractors are well advanced with the detailed design and ordering of the mechanical and electrical services.

It had been planned that work would start on site today, 3 February 1997. Unfortunately London Underground Ltd. and its contractor have not made as much progress as they planned with the construction of the new Westminster station and are not able to hand back the site. My Committee has taken evidence in public and in private from the chief executive of LUL and from the project director on a number of occasions and, while we appreciate the magnitude of their task, they have been left in no doubt of the considerable disappointment that they have not been able to return the site on the due date. In due course the House will be pursuing the remedies available under the terms of the agreement with LUL.

At this stage I cannot advise my right hon. Friend when work will start on site. There have been progressive slippages in the forecast date for the first stage handover and all the indications are that the current forecast of 29 July 1997 may not be achieved. My Committee continues to press London Underground and will keep the matter under continuous scrutiny.

Until there is a date from London Underground in which we can have confidence, it is not possible to give a firm date for the completion of the building. The aim, however, is that occupation should start during the summer recess 2000.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 February 1997

ENVIRONMENT

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14952]

Sir Paul Beresford: The local government review is an opportunity for improved services and more effective local government for the people of Bournemouth. As of 1 April 1997, Bournemouth borough council will be responsible for delivering the full range of local authority services, enabling improved services with efficiency savings.

Bournemouth borough council's standard spending assessment for the financial year 1997–98 will be £119,120,000. This represents an increase of £1,382,000, or 1.2 per cent. on the comparable figure for 1996–97. The Department does not have data for earlier years with which to calculate a SSA for a unitary Bournemouth so it is not possible to make a like-for-like comparison with 1992–93.

It is possible to compare the sum of the SSAs per head of Bournemouth borough council and Dorset police authority in 1997–98 with the sum of SSAs per head of Bournemouth borough council, Dorset county council and Dorset police authority in 1992–93. Although this is not entirely accurate, because it approximates to Bournemouth the average SSA per head of the county and police authority rather than the proportion relating to Bournemouth's needs, it is a reasonable approximation. On this basis, the total SSA per head of Bournemouth and the authorities which precept on it was £684 in 1992–93 and £789 in 1997–98. These figures do not take account of changes in local government functions, for example the transfer of further education from local authorities 1993–94.

Bournemouth borough council was successful in its bid for funding under the pilot capital challenge scheme. The council will receive a credit approval of £1.9 million for environmental works to enhance Bournemouth town square.

Bournemouth is benefiting from two schemes which have received funding from the Government's single regeneration budget challenge fund.

Dorset training and enterprise council's bid, "Community Focus—Turlin Moor and Boscombe", was one of 172 schemes awarded funding under round 2 of the challenge fund. "Community Focus—Turlin Moor and Boscombe" is a four-year scheme to meet training and educational needs in two areas which suffer from high crime rates and low employment. Over the full four years, it should receive a total of £406,000 in support from the challenge fund. This money, complemented by £395,000 of private sector funding and other public money, should create six jobs; involve 100 employers in collaborative education projects; and benefit 720 young people.

Bournemouth borough council's bid, "Making Small Firms Big Business—Dorset", was also awarded funding under round 2 of the challenge fund. "Making Small Firms Big Business—Dorset" is a three-year scheme to improve the infrastructure and competitiveness of the tourist industry in Dorset. Over the full three years, it should receive a total of £314,000 in support from the challenge fund. This money, complemented by £312,000 of private sector funding and £177,000 of other public money, should create or safeguard 51 jobs; advise 1,050 businesses; and help 1,100 people to obtain qualifications.

Residents of Bournemouth who live in houses in multiple occupation such as bedsits, shared houses, hostels and some houses converted into flats, will benefit from measures to improve fire safety and other standards in their homes introduced under the Housing Act 1996. The measures, which will come into force on 3 March, will make it easier for local authorities to ensure that HMOs meet acceptable standards. Bournemouth borough council will also be able to apply to the Department of the Environment for special powers to close down HMOs if they cause a nuisance or annoyance to the neighbourhood and to prevent new HMOs opening if they would be detrimental to the area.

Local Authority Services (Mergers)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what requests for assistance his Department has received from neighbouring or overlapping local authorities considering merging their treasurers, legal services and property services departments; what guidance he has issued on this subject; and if he will make a statement. [15012]

Sir Paul Beresford: While the Government recognise the value of sensible co-operation between the tiers of local authorities, no specific guidance has been issued. However, as part of the exercise on the extension to compulsory competitive tendering, my Department wrote to local authorities on 18 May 1995 outlining the main statutory framework within which authorities may make joint arrangements. No requests for assistance have been received.

Metropolitan District Budgets

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the budget of the metropolitan districts for the current financial year, ranking them from the largest increase over the previous year to the smallest; and if he will make a statement. [15232]

Mr. Curry: The information requested is as follows:

	1995–96 Budget £ million	1995–96 Adjusted budget[1] £ million	1996–97 Budget £ million	Percentage change[2]
Rotherham	191.886	197.234	204.456	3.7
Bury	119.735	120.028	124.278	3.5
Doncaster	218.759	224.525	231.721	3.2
Solihull	132.629	135.811	140.013	3.1
Wigan	215.282	215.809	222.400	3.1
Calderdale	148.223	153.066	157.615	3.0
Barnsley	152.626	157.989	162.581	2.9
Wirral	261.938	273.540	281.336	2.9
Wakefield	219.034	226.390	232.768	2.8
Bolton	203.982	204.591	210.114	2.7
Walsall	206.172	212.314	218.041	2.7
Tameside	165.757	166.501	170.989	2.7
Dudley	204.690	211.519	217.205	2.7
Oldham	186.594	187.047	191.994	2.6
St. Helens	139.371	144.814	148.636	2.6
Trafford	149.211	149.520	153.437	2.6
Knowsley	146.319	150.259	154.007	2.5
South Tyneside	125.289	128.250	131.398	2.5
Leeds	523.139	541.969	555.234	2.4
Birmingham	924.316	948.155	971.119	2.4
Sefton	216.669	225.553	230.927	2.4
North Tyneside	148.463	151.991	155.538	2.3
Sheffield	392.763	406.705	415.883	2.3
Gateshead	163.877	167.542	171.093	2.1
Kirklees	286.117	295.504	301.671	2.1
Manchester	441.632	444.664	453.889	2.1
Coventry	247.102	253.405	258.660	2.1
Liverpool	469.714	485.842	495.894	2.1
Rochdale	166.918	167.553	171.014	2.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	233.991	239.336	244.280	2.1
Bradford	402.125	413.955	422.482	2.1
Wolverhampton	209.220	215.043	219.466	2.1
Sunderland	231.774	236.867	241.695	2.0
Salford	194.050	195.606	199.572	2.0
Sandwell	241.733	249.201	254.205	2.0
Stockport	196.271	196.382	199.761	1.7

[1] Adjusted to take account of community care special grant payable in 1995–96; the ending of metropolitan rail grant; and the opting-out of passenger transport executives from rail service support.
[2] Calculated based on the adjusted budgets.

Ceramic Fibres

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's policy on the classification of ceramic fibres in respect of the review by the EU Commission's Technical Progress Committee; and if he will make a statement on the opportunities for ministerial representations to the committee. [15391]

Sir Paul Beresford: A series of EU technical meetings have examined a number of different possible proposals for the classification of a range of man-made mineral fibres, including ceramic fibres. The meetings have been attended by officials of the Health and Safety Executive who have followed the general policy adopted in these discussions that any proposals should be based on a sound analysis of the scientific evidence.

The purpose of the meetings is to assist the Commission in the preparation of a formal proposal which will then be submitted to a technical progress committee for a vote. When the proposal is made, it will be examined by Ministers, who will then determine the line to be taken by the UK officials who will attend the Committee and vote on behalf of the UK.

Poll Tax and Council Tax

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the amount of poll tax currently outstanding for each of the seven west midlands metropolitan authorities; and if he will list the collection costs for the council tax in the last year for which figures are available in each of those authorities. [15492]

Sir Paul Beresford: Estimates of the levels of community charge arrears for individual authorities are published regularly by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The latest information relates to the position at 31 March 1995 and is available in the revenue collection statistics 1994–95 publication in the Library. The figures for the west midlands authorities are as follows:

£000

	Arrears of community charge at:		Council tax collection costs budgeted
	31 March 1995	31 March 1994	[1]1996–97
Birmingham	19,725	—	5,604
Coventry	14,351	—	2,630
Dudley	4,752	—	1,540
Sandwell	11,155	—	3,143
Solihull	3,505	—	1,469
Walsall	[2]—	12,959	1,676
Wolverhampton	[2]—	[2]—	1,594

[1] Source: Revenue Accounts (RA) 1996–97 return.
[2] No information was published by CIPFA for Walsall for 31 March 1995 or for Wolverhampton since community charge was abolished.

Metropolitan District Staff

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many full-time equivalent employees there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head of population in the service of each metropolitan district. [15483]

Mr. Curry: The information is given in the table.

The levels of employment in individual authorities are not directly comparable because of variations in population structure, social characteristics, hours worked by part-time staff, and the extent to which they use private firms and contractors or act as agents for other authorities.

Joint staffing watch—whole time equivalents at June 1996
Metropolitan Districts

Authority	Staff per	
	Whole time equivalents	Thousand of population
Barnsley	7,926	35.0
Birmingham	35,366	35.1
Bolton	[1]—	[1]—
Bradford	16,347	33.9
Bury	5,306	29.1
Calderdale	5,587	28.9
Coventry	11,164	36.9
Doncaster	9,983	34.1
Dudley	8,860	28.4
Gateshead	8,131	40.2
Kirklees	12,119	31.3
Knowsley	5,389	35.0
Leeds	23,839	32.9
Liverpool	18,642	39.3
Manchester	19,877	46.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	11,519	40.6

Joint staffing watch—whole time equivalents at June 1996
Metropolitan Districts

Authority	*Staff per* *Whole time equivalents*	*Thousand of population*
North Tyneside	6,669	34.4
Oldham	7,578	34.4
Rochdale	6,835	33.0
Rotherham	8,699	33.9
Salford	9,452	41.0
Sandwell	10,309	35.1
Sefton	7,717	26.4
Sheffield	17,252	32.5
Solihull	5,391	26.7
South Tyneside	5,654	36.1
St. Helens	5,872	32.4
Stockport	7,703	26.4
Sunderland	10,977	36.9
Tameside	7,021	31.7
Trafford	5,683	26.1
Wakefield	11,591	36.5
Walsall	8,611	32.6
Wigan	8,287	26.7
Wirral	9,618	28.9
Wolverhampton	8,985	36.7
Total staff/Average staff per thousand population for metropolitan districts	369,959	33.9

Note:
' Data not available.
Source:
Joint Staffing Watch, June 1966.
Figures are for staff in general services—that is, excluding law and order services.

Birds of Prey

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the incidence of the destruction of *(a)* eggs, *(b)* nests and *(c)* breeding habitats of (i) hen harriers and (ii) other birds of prey on privately owned grouse moors. [15643]

Mr. Clappison: None. Birds of prey, their eggs and nests are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Offences against wild birds under this Act are not notifiable.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what were the terms of reference for the BRE Future Group established in December 1995; and how many of its participants are members of the Foundation for the Built Environment; [15613]

(2) if the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the BRE Futures Group were made available to both shortlisted bidders for the Building Research Establishment. [15621]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The terms of reference of the BRE Futures Group, set up in December 1995, were to support the BRE management board in considering the measures to be taken to improve the efficiency and value for money of the establishment, and the continuing management of change within BRE. The group has not met since the competitive sale of BRE was announced. None of the members of the group are members of the Foundation for the Built Environment. No documentation relating to the group was made available to any bidder.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) on what grounds he decided that new legislation was not required to authorise the privatisation of the Building Research Establishment; [15615]

(2) under what existing statutory powers he is proposing to privatise the Building Research Establishment. [15616]

Mr. Jones: The Building Research Establishment is not a statutory body and has no statutory functions. No statutory powers are therefore required to transfer it to the private sector. The transfer can be effected by way of an ordinary contract of sale.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date the first results of their 1997–98 bids, in respect of projects under the partners in technology scheme, were made available to the Building Research Establishment executive agency. [15617]

Mr. Jones: My Department wrote to BRE on 14 January listing the partners in technology projects that it is prepared to support subject to contract.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if minutes and working papers of the management board meetings of the Building Research Establishment were made available to both the shortlisted bidders for the Building Research Establishment. [15619]

Mr. Jones: Relevant working papers of the management board were made available to both short-listed bidders for BRE. In addition, once the competitive sale of BRE was announced, the Department was required to be represented at all meetings at which decisions might be taken which would materially affect the conduct of the business, including meetings of the BRE management board. In some cases, where the discussion warranted it, a supplementary note was put in the data room for the information of bidders.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who will bear the legal liability, or any share of that liability, for claims arising from work carried out or advice given by the Building Research Establishment before its privatisation. [15622]

Mr. Jones: Legal liability remains the subject of negotiation between the Department and the preferred purchaser of BRE.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department decided to privatise the Building Research Establishment. [15614]

Mr. Jones: My right hon. Friend announced on 7 November 1995 his decision to move the BRE to the private sector and his intention to commission a study of the options for transfer. This decision was confirmed in his announcement on 2 April 1996 of his preferred way forward for effecting the transfer.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements were put in place to ensure a separation of the roles of members of the management bid team at the Building Research Establishment as bidders for the Building Research Establishment and as members of the Building Research Establishment management; when these arrangements were put into effect; and what steps were taken to monitor their effectiveness. [15618]

Mr. Jones: The Department issued guidance to the management and BRE staff when permission was given for the management bid team to express an interest in purchasing BRE. This guidance has been updated as necessary as the sale process has progressed. Its operation is overseen by the team of officials establishment by the Department to transfer BRE to the private sector.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if progress reports on the efficiency review of the Building Research Establishment's library service were made available to both shortlisted bidders for the Building Research Establishment. [15620]

Mr. Jones: Yes.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Section 2 Awards

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for the last three years for which figures are available *(a)* the total number and *(b)* the total value in current prices, of section 2 discretionary awards made to (i) post-graduate students, (ii) students aged 16 to 18 years undertaking further education and (iii) students aged 19 years and over undertaking further education, in each Government region. [15447]

Mr. Forth: The information requested is given in the following tables.

1. Section 2 discretionary awards to post-graduate students

Academic years 1992–93 to 1994–95 by Government Office Region in England and in Wales[1]

	Number of awards (000s)			*Total expenditure £ million*[2]		
	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
North East	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.9	0.5	0.3
North West	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.6	1.1
Merseyside	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.4	0.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.2	0.2
East Midlands	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.5	0.4	0.1
West Midlands	0.5	0.1	0.1	1.6	0.4	0.3
South West	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.6	0.5	0.2
Eastern	0.3	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0
London	0.3	0.2	0.2	1.1	0.4	0.5
South East	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.9	0.5	0.6
Wales	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.1	0.1

[1] Made by local education authorities in each region to students normally domiciled in their area.
[2] In 1996–97 prices using the GDP deflator for each year for fee expenditure and the RPI (excluding mortgage interest payments) of September of each year for maintenance expenditure.

2. Section 2 discretionary awards to further education students aged 16 to 18 years[1]

Academic years 1992–93 to 1994–95 by Government Office Region in England and in Wales[2]

	Number of awards (000s)			*Total expenditure £ million*[3]		
	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
North East	2.9	7.0	7.1	1.4	4.4	3.3
North West	11.9	20.8	20.6	4.8	9.8	8.6
Merseyside	4.1	3.3	3.7	1.8	1.9	1.3
Yorkshire and Humberside	17.0	13.2	13.1	5.3	5.0	4.9
East Midlands	11.9	6.0	5.9	4.2	3.8	2.8
West Midlands	6.3	7.1	8.6	2.6	2.2	2.6
South West	9.4	11.5	10.7	6.1	6.6	5.8
Eastern	8.7	7.1	7.8	6.2	5.0	5.2
London	9.2	12.5	12.7	4.2	5.0	5.3
South East	11.6	22.2	22.4	4.3	8.7	8.8
Wales	13.9	14.0	13.5	7.0	3.9	4.0

[1] Data on awards to 16 to 18 year olds were collected only for awards made at less than 50 per cent. of the mandatory rate in 1992–93; Table 3 may include some awards made at more than 50 per cent. of the mandatory rate to 16 to 18 year olds although, in general, full value awards (made at 50 to 100 per cent. of the mandatory rate) are made to students over 19 years old.
[2] Made by local education authorities in each region to students normally domiciled in their area.
[3] In 1992–97 prices using the GDP deflator for each year for fee expenditure and the RPI (excluding mortgage interest payments) of September of each year for maintenance expenditure.

3. Section 2 discretionary awards to further education students aged 19 years and over[1]
Academic years 1992–93 to 1994–95 by Government Office Region in England and in Wales[2]

	Number of awards (000s)			*Total expenditure £ million*[3]		
	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
North East	4.1	4.4	3.6	7.7	5.7	4.1
North West	16.9	10.5	7.4	18.8	13.7	9.3
Merseyside	2.5	2.4	1.8	5.2	3.9	2.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	12.7	11.1	5.9	21.2	13.4	9.0
East Midlands	11.3	15.0	4.3	16.5	10.2	5.8
West Midlands	3.5	4.1	3.4	5.9	4.5	3.2
South West	11.9	9.6	4.3	23.0	11.1	6.3
Eastern	6.1	6.7	6.0	12.1	8.3	7.2
London	3.2	2.9	2.2	6.4	4.5	3.9
South East	9.6	10.3	10.1	16.8	16.2	14.0
Wales	6.7	5.2	4.4	8.0	6.3	3.7

[1] Data on awards to 16 to 18 year olds were collected only for awards made at less than 50 per cent. of the mandatory rate in 1992–93; Table 3 may include some awards made at more than 50 per cent. of the mandatory rate to 16 to 18 year olds although, in general, full value awards (made at 50 to 100 per cent. of the mandatory rate) are made to students over 19 years old.
[2] Made by local education authorities in each region to students normally domiciled in their area.
[3] In 1996–97 prices using the GDP deflator for each year for fee expenditure and the RPI (excluding mortgage interest payments) of September of each year for maintenance expenditure.

National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library copies of the submissions made to date to the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education. [15229]

Mr. Forth: Copies of papers submitted jointly by the Department for Education and Employment, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland were placed in the Library in July 1996, as was subsequent evidence by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department in November 1996, the Department of Trade and Industry in November 1996 and the Department for Education and Employment earlier this month. It is for the committee of inquiry as an independent body to decide whether or not to make evidence submitted by others publicly available, taking into account any requests for confidentiality.

University Research

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what representations she has received relating to capital equipment for university research; and if she will make a statement; [15266]

(2) what assessment she has made of the costs involved in replacing obsolete capital equipment for university research; and if she will make a statement. [15268]

Mr. Forth: We have received a number of representations about the cost of updating research equipment from universities and other bodies, including the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the Committee of University Chairmen and the Standing Conference of Principals. These representations are reflected in the reports of the joint DfEE—higher education sector working groups submitted to my right hon. Friend and placed in the Library last July. In response to such representations, my right hon. Friend is making available to the Higher Education Funding Council for England additional earmarked funds in both 1996–97 and 1997–98 for research equipment, to be matched with private contributions. In particular, the extra £100 million grant announced at the Budget for the HEFCE in 1997–88 includes £20 million specifically for research equipment, which is expected to generate matching private funds. The costs of up-dating research equipment are always likely to be high, but the earmarked funds—together with contributions from other funders—represent a significant contribution towards meeting them.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the private finance initiative has met the Government's objectives in respect of capital equipment for university research; and if she will make a statement. [15267]

Mr. Forth: Procurement decisions in the higher education sector rest in the hands of independent, autonomous institutions who may use a range of different financial sources to fund capital projects, including those for research equipment. The overall yield from PFI is therefore dependent on the decisions made by those independent institutions.

Following the joint DfEE-HE sector working group report on PFI in higher education, the HEFCE is currently considering a second round of bids for pathfinder status focusing on equipment.

Adult Training Courses

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received about the cessation of funding for adult training courses dependent upon the Further Education Funding Council; and if she will make a statement. [15464]

Mr. Paice: The Department has received recently a number of representations on the subject of the funding of further education, including adult education training courses. On behalf of my right hon. Friend, I announced on 5 February arrangements for the future funding of further education, and copies of my letter to all further education colleges have been placed in the Library.

Skill Shortages

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessments are made of the extent of skill shortages affecting employers. [15611]

Mr. Paice: The Department funds an annual survey of employers' recruitment difficulties and monitors similar surveys carried out by others.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new proposals he has to improve the accuracy of statistics on illegal drug use. [14189]

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 11 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *1*.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration detainees were held in *(a)* United Kingdom prisons by establishment and *(b)* (i) Campsfield house, (ii) Harmondsworth, (iii) Haslar, (iv) Meadvale Queens building, Heathrow, and (v) Tinsley house, on the nights of 31 January 1996 and 31 January 1997; and if he will make a statement. [15692]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information available is given in the table.

Persons recorded as being in detention solely under Immigration Act powers, by establishment

Establishment	*31 January 1996*	*31 January 1997*
Prison Service establishment in England and Wales[1]:		
Haslar	118	[3]129
Other establishments	402	[3]347
	520	469[2]
Immigration Service detention centres:		
Campsfield house	197	195
Gatwick Meadvale	29	42
Harmondsworth	91	90
Heathrow Queen's building	14	15
Tinsley house	[3]—	134

[1] Corresponding data for Scottish prisons are incomplete and have been excluded.

[2] Figure relates to 31 December 1996.

[3] Not open at the time.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum seekers were detained for a period of more than 48 hours during 1996; [15583]

(2) what percentage of asylum seekers were detained in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1995. [15584]

Miss Widdecombe: Reliable information on the historical flow of persons placed into detention, and on the length of such detention, can be obtained only through examination of individual case records. The information requested is therefore available only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the cases of asylum seekers on hunger strike at Her Majesty's prison Rochester have been brought for independent review before a judicial authority. [15600]

Miss Widdecombe: On 12 February 1997, the total number of Rochester immigration detainees refusing food was eight, of whom six have sought asylum at some stage.

It has been open to all of these detainees to seek bail, habeas corpus or judicial review, and four are known to have done so.

Street Crime (East Staffordshire)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the effect on the level of street crime in east Staffordshire of the introduction of closed circuit television in Burton and Uttoxeter. [15396]

Mr. Maclean: The closed circuit television system in Burton has been operational for 16 months. The local police report that it has led to a reduction in auto-related crime of 95 per cent. and to a significant reduction in the number of public order offences. It has also had social benefits in terms of making people feel safer when visiting the town. Details of the effect of the system on crime levels in the wider east Staffordshire area are not available.

Although the borough of east Staffordshire was awarded a grant in the second Home Office CCTV challenge competition to assist with the installation of CCTV in Uttoxeter, the system has not yet become operational.

Surveillance Equipment

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to take disciplinary action against a chief constable responsible for the misuse of surveillance equipment; and what steps he has taken in consequence of such misuse within the last eight years. [15438]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has no role in disciplinary proceedings except in that he is the appellate authority for all disciplined police officers. Under the Police (Discipline) (Senior Officers) Regulations 1985, the disciplinary authority for senior officers, including chief constables, lies with police authorities. In the Metropolitan police service, the disciplinary authority is the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. We are not aware of any disciplinary action having been taken against a chief constable in respect of alleged misuse of surveillance equipment.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what records are kept by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* Home Office officials, *(c)* the Police Complaints Authority, *(d)* Her Majesty's inspectors of constabulary and *(e)* chief police officers about the use of surveillance equipment by chief police officers. [15435]

Mr. Maclean: Records on the use of surveillance equipment by the police are not held centrally by Ministers or Home Office officials. Each force maintains its own records and these are available for inspection by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. The Police

Complaints Authority would not hold any information unless it related to an investigation into alleged misconduct.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Home Office guidelines exist for ensuring that surveillance equipment is not misused by police officers and what is the legal force of such guidelines; when were such guidelines first introduced; what happened prior to the introduction of the guidelines; when were the guidelines first published; how are copies of the guidelines obtained by the public; what modifications have been made since the guidelines were first introduced; and when and for what reason each modification was made. [15437]

Mr. Maclean: Intrusive police surveillance operations are presently authorised in accordance with guidelines issued by the Home Office in 1984. These guidelines have no statutory force. Formal guidance was first introduced by the Home Office in 1977 and, prior to 1977, police forces operated under the individual direction of their own chief officers. The 1984 Home Office guidelines were made public in a reply to a question from the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. Mackay) on 19 December 1984, *Official Report*, columns *157–58*, and a copy was placed in the Library. Copies are available to the public on request from the Home Office. The only modification has been the replacement of the 1977 guidance with the current 1984 guidelines.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animal Transport (MV Cap Afrique)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many bovine animals were imported on 23 January on the MV Cap Afrique; if such animals entered and were rested at an EU-approved collection centre operating in full compliance with European law; and what was the age of such animals. [14607]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* Forty bovine animals were imported on 23 January on the MV Cap Afrique. They were between 20 and 30 months of age. The animals were rested before being transported to their final destination. The resting place used is also an EC-approved collection centre but it was not operating as such when the animals were rested there.

BSE

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when specified bovine material was banned in *(a)* the Irish Republic and *(b)* each other EU country. [14770]

Mrs. Browning: The three other EU member states which have reported cases of BSE in native-born animals—France, Irish Republic and Portugal—all have some form of specified bovine material controls on cattle at slaughter. We understand the following controls apply.

The Irish Republic introduced legislation on 22 April 1996, prohibiting the use, sale or export of specified bovine material—defined as the bones of the skull, brain, eyes, spinal cord, spleen, thymus, tonsils and intestines and mechanically recovered meat obtained from bovine vertebrae excluding the tail—for human consumption unless licensed by the Minister.

In France legislation came into force on 28 June 1996 requiring the removal at the abattoir and incineration of:

(a) the brains, spinal cord and eyes of all bovines over six months; and

(b) the thymus, tonsils, spleen and intestines of cattle born or imported into France before 31 July 1991.

In addition, legislation introduced in September 1996, amending the June order, prohibits the sale of brains, spinal cord and eyes of bovines over six months.

In Portugal, legislation came into force on 28 January 1997 banning the use of certain bovine materials—including brains, spinal cord, eyes, tonsils, spleen, thymus and intestines—from any cattle of any age in the preparation of medical, pharmaceutical, and cosmetic products and in food.

No other member states have SBM controls on domestic production. The Government continue to press the Commission on this matter.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee to complete its investigation of possible links between the use of organophosphate warble fly treatments and the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement. [14823]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 7 February 1997]:* The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee is not currently investigating the use of organophosphate pesticides and a possible link with BSE. The theory that BSE could have been caused by the exposure of cattle to OP pesticides as a treatment for warble fly infestation has already been considered in detail by scientists in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health and the Medical Research Council. A report from SEAC entitled "Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies—A Summary of Present knowledge and Research" (HMSO ISBN 0 11 242 9874) published in 1995 and available in the Library of the House, reviewed a number of alternative theories of BSE, including the OP theory, concluded that none justified extending the current research programme to investigate them further at that stage. The report notes that the original epidemiological investigation considered any possible association between the use of agricultural chemicals, including OP insecticides, and the occurrence of BSE. None was found.

I am aware of the recent press reports concerning new research carried out by the Institute of Psychiatry on behalf of Mr. Purdey into the use of phosmet and its possible association with BSE. Mr. Purdey has yet to produce any new scientific evidence to support his hypothesis or to cause us to question ours that BSE is of feed origin; a hypothesis that has been established form objective scientific research.

SEAC will be looking again at the possibility of a link between BSE and the use of certain OPs. Mr. Purdey has been asked to prepare a paper for presentation at a forthcoming SEAC meeting to define the latest theory on organophosphates and a possible link with BSE.

Turkeys

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps *(a)* to reduce the incidence of degenerative hip disorders and leg disorders in adult male turkeys, *(b)* to bring beak-trimming of turkeys to an end and *(c)* to secure an end to the selective breeding practices in respect of turkeys; and if he will make a statement. [15498]

Mrs. Browning: The Government endorse the Farm Animal Welfare Council's view that high levels of leg disorders in adult male turkeys should be avoided by the continued application of careful selection and good management practices.

The Government also support the Farm Animal Welfare Council's view that the long-term aim should be to end the need for beak-trimming. We are funding research into improved rearing methods which will assist in its achievement.

I cannot agree with the implied suggestion that selective breeding is an inherently undesirable practice.

I refer the hon. Member to the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of turkeys, and to the Government's response to it, for a fuller assessment of turkey welfare and account of the steps the Government are taking to improve it.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Flander's Folly, Craven Arms

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what powers his Department has in respect of preventing Flander's Folly, Craven Arms from falling into disrepair and dilapidation. [15357]

Mr. Sproat: Responsibility for the upkeep of a historic building rests primarily with its owner. In the case of a historic building which has deteriorated to the extent that its preservation may be at risk, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State looks to the relevant local authority to take statutory action. Local authorities are empowered to serve notice on the owner of a listed building specifying works necessary for its preservation and, in the event of the owner failing to take action, to begin compulsory purchase proceedings. Authorities also have power to carry out works which are urgently necessary for preservation of an unoccupied listed building and recover the costs from the owner.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has similar statutory powers to those of local authorities. Her policy is to treat them as reserve powers, for use only in exceptional cases. On the information available, Flander's Folly, which is listed grade II, seems unlikely to be such a case.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by Benefits Agency region the number of pensioners who also claim income support; and if he will make a staement. [14999]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 12 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will list by Benefit Agency region the number of pensioners who also claim income support; and if he will make a statement.

The latest information available is shown on the attached table.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Number of pensioners in receipt of Income Support (IS) by Benefits Agency (BA) Area Directorate

BA Area Directorate (AD)	*Number of pensioners in receipt of IS as at the end of November 1996*
AD 1 East London and Anglia	146,954
AD 2 Chilterns	129,154
AD 3 London South	201,698
AD 4 West Country	128,811
AD 5 Mercia	135,936
AD 6 West Midlands	145,958
AD 7 Wales	91,729
AD 8 North West Coast	118,553
AD 9 Greater Manchester	111,046
AD 10 Yorkshire	149,507
AD 11 Tyne and Tees	89,541
AD 12 West of Scotland	75,212
AD 13 East of Scotland	88,823

The data have been provided by the Benefits Agency's Central Data Unit and is subject to amendment.
The data relates to customers in receipt of a pensioner premium because the customer or partner is aged not less than 60.

Jobseeker's Allowance (Devon)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients there are of the jobseeker's allowance in *(a)* north Devon and *(b)* Devon; and how many of these are aged under 25 years. [15092]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of jobseeker's allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Nick Harvey, dated 12 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many recipients there are of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in (a) North Devon; and (b) Devon; and how many of these are aged under 25 years.

The information is not available in the format requested. JSA payments are currently made via two computer systems, the JSA computer system (JSAPS) and the National Unemployment Benefit computer system (NUBS). It is expected that all JSA payments will be transferred on to and paid by the JSAPS by December 1997.

Statistics are not kept by customer age group.

The available information is in the attached table.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Number of recipients of jobseeker's allowance (JSA)

	JSA paid via the National Unemployment Benefit computer system (NUBS) during week commencing 24 January 1997 and 31 January 1997	*JSA paid via the JSA computer system as at the end of November 1996*
North Devon[1]	2,725	3,031
Devon[2]	19,487	4,977

[1] North Devon includes: the Benefits Agency (BA) offices of Barnstaple, Exeter and Newton Abbot; and the Employment Service (ES) offices of Bude, Barnstaple, Bideford and Ilfracombe.

[2] Devon includes: the BA offices of Barnstaple, Exeter, Newton Abbot, Plymouth Crownhill, Plymouth Durley, Saltash and Torbay; and the ES offices of Bude, Barnstaple, Bideford, Ilfracombe, Axminster, Exeter, Exmouth, Honiton, Okehampton, Sidmouth, Tiverton, Brixham, Newton Abbot, Paignton, Teignmouth, Torquay, Totnes, Buckwell, Devonport, Hoegate, Plympton, Saltash and Tavistock.

The BA information has been provided by the Central Data Unit. The NUBS information has been provided by the South West Region's Employment Intelligence Unit. Data is subject to amendment.

National Insurance Contributions

Sir Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the revenue which will be generated by the removal of the cap on national insurance contributions. [14173]

Mr. Heald: If the upper earnings limit on employees' class 1 contributions and the upper profits limit on self-employed class 4 contributions were removed, it is estimated that an extra £3.75 billion would be collected in a full year.[1]

Note:

[1] The estimate is based on the assumption that the current 10 per cent. class 1 contribution rate would apply to earnings above the upper earnings limit and that the current 6 per cent. class 4 contribution rate would apply to profits above the upper profits limit.

PRIME MINISTER

Homelessness (London)

9. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to meet representatives of London's homeless. [14167]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. However, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing is in regular contact with the voluntary agencies which co-operate with the Government in the rough sleepers initiative. I am kept closely informed on this matter.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February. [14312]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 13 February. [14311]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Secretary of State for Health

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister what responsibilities in respect of the Government's policies towards constitutional matters he has given to the Secretary of State for Health. [15503]

The Prime Minister: Ministers have collective responsibility for all the Government's policies.

NHS (Performance)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the performance of the NHS in the United Kingdom *(a)* since 1979 and *(b)* between 1974 and 1979. [16142]

The Prime Minster: Since 1979, the Government have established a record of significant and sustained improvements to the funding and management of the national health service, to patient services and to the pay and conditions of service of professional staff. For example:

spending on the NHS has increased by 75 per cent. in real terms. Between 1974 and 1979, in real terms spending increased by 17 per cent.

since 1979, capital spending has increased by 66 per cent. in real terms. Between 1974 and 1979, there was real-terms cut of 28 per cent.

the NHS is now one of the most efficient health services in the world. It treats 25 per cent. more patients per pound, at constant prices, than it did in 1979

since 1979, the percentage of gross domestic product spent on health in the United Kingdom has risen from 4.7 per cent. to 5.8 per cent. Between 1974 and 1979, the percentage of GDP spent on health in the United Kingdom fell from 4.8 per cent to 4.7 per cent.

I regret that there was an error in my oral reply of 11 February, *Official Report*, column 137. The correct figure for general and acute activity between 1974 and 1979, is an increase of 7 per cent. Since 1979, general and acute patient activity has increased by 80 per cent.

the number of doctors in England has increased by 23,000 since 1979

the number of qualified nurses and midwives has increased by around 55,000 since 1979

the number of dentists has increased by more than 6,000 since 1978

doctors' and dentists' average earnings have gone up by 74 per cent. in real terms compared with 0.1 per cent. between 1974 and 1979

nurses' average earnings have increased by 71 per cent. in real terms since 1979. Between 1974 and 1979, nurses' average earnings decreased by 3 per cent.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Recorders (Members of Parliament)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many hon. Members

sit as a recorder or part-time recorder; what are the conditions under which they preside; and what is their remuneration. [15578]

Mr. Streeter: There are three hon. Members who sit as recorders; there are none who sit as assistant recorders. I have deposited a copy of the "Terms and Conditions of Service of Recorders" in the House of Commons Library. By custom, Members who are recorders do not either sit in their constituencies or hear cases remitted from their constituencies. As from 1 December 1996, recorders receive a fee of £366 for each day they sit.

Land Registration Act 1925

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report,* column *511,* on the joint working party on reform of the Land Registration Act 1925, if he will list the dates on which the joint working party has met. [15450]

Mr. Streeter: The joint working party has met on seven occasions, as follows: 27 April 1994, 29 September 1994, 11 November 1994, 16 February 1995, 2 July 1996, 23 July 1996 and 23 October 1996.

Mr. Colin Balchin

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what factors underlie the delay in paying costs to Mr. Colin Balchin following his acquittal at Kingston crown court, case number TO960656. [14355]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Sir Julian Critchley, dated 13 February 1997

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the factors underlying the delay in paying costs to Colin Balchin.

As Mr. Balchin's claim exceeds £4000 it was sent to the Central Taxing Team (CTT) for taxation. The CTT aims to complete taxation within 3 months of receipt of all of the claims in a case. Mr. Balchin's claim was ready for taxation in early September but was not taxed until 31 January. The delay was caused by a 65 per cent. increase in the work of the CTT over the past year which has created a backlog. Efforts are being made to tackle this backlog and the arrears have been reduced since September.

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14944]

Mr. Streeter: On 2 December 1996, the new Bournemouth combined court centre was opened. The court provides improved facilities for both court users and staff in Bournemouth. This includes the Probate Service, which has previously used accommodation at the magistrates courts.

More broadly, while some of the policies of the Lord Chancellor's Department may have a particular effect in certain localities, they are generally designed to benefit the population at large.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Post Office Users Council for Northern Ireland

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many members of the Post Office Users Council for Northern Ireland there are; how many of these are perceived to be from the Protestant community; and how many are members of *(a)* the Ulster Unionist party, *(b)* the Democratic Unionist party, *(c)* the Social and Democratic Labour Party and *(d)* the Alliance Party. [14687]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are currently six members of the Post Office Users Council for Northern Ireland, including the chairman. Information is not available on either their political or their religious affiliations.

Garden Birds (Export)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number and type of British garden birds exported in each year since 1990 by *(a)* numbers, *(b)* species and *(c)* countries of destination. [15579]

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is not available from the United Kingdom overseas trade statistics because the system under which trade is recorded does not separately identify exports of garden birds.

Coal Industry

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have had with the coal industry regarding its future; and if he will make a statement. [15880]

Mr. Page: My officials and I are frequently in contact with those engaged in the coal industry on a wide range of issues relating to its current performance and future prospects.

North-West Konver Working Group

Mr. Dover: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the members of the North-west Konver working group. [15612]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Members of the North-west Konver working group are as follows:

	Organisation
Chair Chris France	Acting Director Europe, Government Office North West
Secretariat Alex Findlay, Carole Lythall, Rob Shipway, Mike Warburton, Vernon Clarke	

Members	*Organisation*
Mark Gallagher	European Commission
Pauline Herbert	Cumbria Training and Enterprise Council
Sheila Powell	Lancashire County Council
Colin Campbell	Chorley Borough Council
Tracey Morrison	Fylde Borough Council
Eric Hookway	Cumbria County Council
Tom Campbell	Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council
David Ingham	Carlisle Borough Council
Mark Ellison	Hyndburn Borough Council
Mike Dowden	Lancashire Enterprises Ltd. (LEL)
Roy Smith	LEL
Dr. Malcolm Green	British Aerospace Defence Ltd.
Harry Knowles	Furness Enterprise Ltd.
Michael Damms	East Lancs Chamber of Commerce
Roger Munns	Consortium of East Lancs Colleges
Jenny Booth	DfEE ESF Unit
Marcelle Janssis	DTI European Cohesion Division

Iraq (Trade Restrictions)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance has been given by his Department to British companies attending trade fairs in Iraq in 1996. [10748]

Mr. Nelson: The DTI offered no support for British companies to attend trade fairs in Iraq in 1996 under the trade fairs support scheme. However, following the limited lifting of UN sanctions in 1996, four licences were issued to a UK exhibition organiser to assist British companies participating in exhibitions covering the water industry, medical equipment, oil and gas and an international trade fair.

Prohibited Weapons (Export)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to monitor separately the export of those weapons prohibited under the term of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill. [14111]

Mr. Nelson: My Department does not monitor the subsequent export of licensed goods.

Privatised Utilities (Information)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what redress is available to shareholders who believe that information given by them to a utility has been revealed without their consent; and if he will make a statement; [15346]

(2) if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which a utility may divulge information given by shareholders for one purpose to a third party to be used for another purpose. [15344]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The privatised utilities are subject to the same laws concerning data protection as any publicly quoted company. Data protection legislation is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. I understand from him that the use of computerised personal data, including its disclosure, is governed by the Data Protection Act 1984. Responsibility for supervising and enforcing the Act lies with the Data Protection Registrar, to whom a complaint may be made if there is thought to have been a breach of the law.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) pursuant to his answer of 7 November, *Official Report*, column *277*, when he expects the completion of the criteria for potential lenders to the loan guarantee scheme; [13000]

(2) when he expects new specialist lenders in the technology sector to be added to the loan guarantee scheme's list of approved lenders. [12956]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* Following detailed consideration, the criteria for new lenders for the loan guarantee scheme have been agreed. We will shortly be writing to potential lenders seeking information, particularly about their experience and expertise in lending within the technology sector.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many contracts his Department has had with consultants; and what has been the total cost in each year since 1979–80. [15370]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* The number of external consultancy contracts let centrally by the Department of Trade and Industry, 1995–96, plus value—including contract amendments—is as follows:

Year	*Number*	*Value (£)*
1995	81	5,600,000
1996	45	1,368,000

For information on contracts let centrally in 1990 to 1994, I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member on 18 July 1995, *Official Report*, column *1219*.

Details for the years 1979 to 1989 can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The information given does not include contracts let by the Department's executive agencies, and I have asked the chief executives to reply separately to this question.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 13 February 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply to your question about the number of contracts The Insolvency Service has let to consultants and their total cost in each year since 1979–80.

Prior to 1994 contracts for consultants were let by the Department of Trade and Industry, and information relating to 1992 and 1993 was provided in the answer to Parliamentary Question No.146 put down by Ms Diane Abbott MP and dated 25 January 1994 (Columns 211–217). Information on consultancies prior to 1992 can only now be provided at disproportionate cots.

Details of those consultants The Service has engaged in each financial year since 1 April 1993, together with their costs, are:

Year	Organisation	Value (including VAT) £
1993–94	KPMG	45,000
	Ernst and Young	107,800
	BDO Stoy Hayward	76,670
1994–95	Price Waterhouse	124,800
	BDO Stoy Hayward	94,154
	Coopers and Lybrand	60,000
	Bond Pearce	10,100
	Ernst and Young	14,776
	Shreeveport	129,000
1995–96	Shreeveport	460,492
	Bevan Ashford	35,653
	Bond Pearce	6,392
	Ernst and Young	7,284

Letter from Jim Norton to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 13 February 1997:

EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS ENGAGED BY THE RADIOCOMMUNICATIONS AGENCY

Mr Taylor, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Corporate and Consumer Affairs, has asked me to reply on behalf of the Radiocommunications Agency to your Parliamentary Question about external consultants.

The number, and cost, of contracts let by the Agency to external consultants since it assumed responsibility from the DTI for doing so is as follows:

FY 94/95 six contracts valued at £238k;

FY 95/96 eight contracts valued at £256k;

FY 96/97 six contracts (to date) valued at £380k.

Letter from John Holden to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 13 February 1997:

You recently tabled a Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade on consultancy contracts. I am replying as Chief Executive of Companies House Executive Agency.

In my letter in response to your similar question tabled on 14 October 1996, I set out the cost, at 1996/97 prices, of consultancy services provided to Companies House since 1992/93. The amounts in cash terms (ie money of the day) were as follows:

Year	£ thousand
1992–93	293
1993–94	172
1994–95	122
1995–96	199

I regret that the information for earlier years can only be provided at disproportionate cost, since 1992/93 was the first full year for which Companies House operated its own free standing accounting systems. Companies House's use of consultants is mainly for specialist IT design and implementation and structural building matters. The expenditure is incurred with varying numbers of diverse specialists and the number of contracts with consultants (as opposed to the actual expenditure itself) cannot be determined with any accuracy within the time available. For example, in 1995/96 alone, some 90 payments are recorded on the accounting system. The overall pattern is one of a large number of relatively small payments, and it would take disproportionate effort to allocate each of these to particular contracts over the period.

Letter from Seton Bennett to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 13 February 1997:

The President of the Board of Trade has asked me to reply on behalf of the National Weights and Measures Laboratory (NWML) to your question about the contracts his Department has had with consultants.

1990/91 is the first year for which separate figures for NWML are available and the figures for the years since then are as follows:

Year	Number of contracts	Total cost (£000)
1990–91	0	—
1991–92	0	—
1992–93	1	7
1993–94	1	20
1994–95	0	—
1995–96	1	4
1996–97	0	—

Letter from P. R. S. Hartnack to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 13 February 1997:

I am replying for the Patent Office to your Parliamentary Question to the President of the Board of Trade about contracts placed with consultants.

The Patent Office has let 27 such contracts since 1990. The cost in each year has been 1990 £3,500, 1991 £4,700, 1992 £45,000, 1993 £46,000, 1994 £80,000, 1995 £138,000 and 1996 £99,700. I am unable to provide information for years earlier than 1990 without disproportionate cost.

Local Development Agencies

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what guidelines his Department issues to local development agencies in respect of them approaching companies in other areas to propose expansions or relocations away from their home areas; and what proposals he has to change these guidelines; [15645]

(2) what rules govern the operation of local development agencies. [15655]

Mr. Greg Knight: My Department does not provide grants or operate guidelines to local development agencies for domestic promotional activities. It does give grants to regional development organisations in England, whose task is to assist the Invest in Britain Bureau in promoting the benefits of the UK and their regions as a location for inward investment. Where investment grants may be available under the regional selective assistance scheme, there are guidelines which rule out support simply for jobs being transferred from one part of the country to another. Assistance would be available only to eligible expansion projects which led to a net national benefit.

TRANSPORT

Driving Standards Agency

Sir John Cope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are his plans for establishing the Driving Standards Agency as a trading fund. [16140]

Sir George Young: I have today laid an order in draft which, subject to the approval of the House, will establish the Driving Standards Agency as a trading fund from 8 am on 1 April 1997.

Although driving test fees are set at a level to cover DSA's full costs, the agency currently surrenders all fee receipts to the Consolidated Fund and its expenditure is financed from my Department's vote. As a trading fund, the test fee receipts will become DSA's income.

Driving test candidates pay test fees several weeks in advance of taking the driving test. The DSA has estimated that it will be liable to conduct £7 million worth of driving tests from 1 April 1997 for which it will have surrendered test fee receipts to the Consolidated Fund. In order to establish the DSA as a trading fund with sufficient assets to cover its liabilities, some £7 million—equivalent to the fees paid in advance and surrendered to the Consolidated Fund—will be paid to the DSA on 1 April before the trading fund order takes effect.

Parliamentary approval of this payment will be sought in the main estimates for 1997–98 for the Department of Transport vote, class 5, vote 6. Pending that approval, the necessary sum will be met by a repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund.

London Underground (Blood Alcohol Tests)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with London Transport Underground management the introduction of the same system of random blood and alcohol level testing of staff members with safety responsibilities as is applied to railway company services. [15465]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for London Underground, which I understand already has a very comprehensive system of alcohol and drugs testing for employees with safety responsibilities, using breath and urine tests. This includes screening of all new employees as well as a programme of unannounced tests on a selected sample of safety critical staff.

Thames Bridge Construction

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussion his Department has had with Kvaerner about the construction of a Thames bridge to be funded by continuing the tolling on the existing Dartford–Thurrock crossing; and if he will make a statement. [15687]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *62*.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many British-based companies operate *(a)* passenger aircraft more than (i) 20 years old and (ii) 25 years old and *(b)* freight aircraft more than (i) 20 years old and (ii) 25 years old; and if he will make a statement; [15272]

(2) if he will make a statement on the safety record of aircraft operated by British-based companies. [15224]

Mr. Bowis: As of 10 February 1997, there were only four aircraft on the UK register of civil aircraft holding current transport category (cargo) certificates of airworthiness. Aircraft with transport category (passenger) certificates of airworthiness may be operated for any purpose, including the carriage of cargo; for this reason, the table does not distinguish between passenger and freight aircraft.

Aircraft over 5,700 kg maximum permitted take-off weight with a current transport category certificate of airworthiness

Construction date	*Number of aircraft*	*Number of owners*
1972–76 inclusive	37	24
Pre 1972	72	20

The Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for the safety regulation of UK registered aircraft. The CAA has comprehensive maintenance requirements which ensure the continued airworthiness of all aircraft and especially older aircraft which may need more intensive maintenance. The CAA has played a major role in identifying maintenance requirements for ageing aircraft and in helping to ensure that these steps are implemented internationally. The very high standards of safety which all UK operators must attain have resulted in a very good aviation safety record.

Railways (Targets)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received in respect of setting targets for *(a)* increasing rail freight and *(b)* levels of investment in the railways; and if he will make a statement. [15342]

Mr. Watts: None.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on the export of military equipment to Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [15203]

Mr. David Davis: We fully support United Nations Security Council resolution 1062 which expresses

"serious concern about the modernisation and upgrading of military forces"

on Cyprus. We will therefore grant licences for the export of equipment only to the military forces of either side on the island of Cyprus which we are satisfied does not fall within the following categories as defined by the EU common embargo list:

(a) Weapons designed to kill and their ammunition; or

(b) Weapons platforms; or

(c) Ancillary equipment which is specifically designed for use in conjunction with either (a) or (b).

Within this context, export licence applications will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Note: Among other items category (a) includes guns, bombs, torpedoes, rockets, missiles, fire control systems and tanks. Category (b) includes armed and armoured vehicles or vehicles with fitted mountings for arms, vessels of war, aircraft and helicopters.

HEALTH

Nerve Gas Attack (Japan)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what ways the Department of Health is intending to review and assess the clinical data of the long-term health effects arising out of the nerve gas attacks on the Tokyo subway and Matsumato in 1994 and 1995. [14417]

Mr. Horam: Department of Health officials have examined available published papers on the health outcomes of the incidents in Tokyo and Matsumoto, and will continue to do so as further work appears.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *758*, what was the title of the conference attended by the official of his Department in July 1995; who were the organisers of this conference and where this conference was held; when the small working group is expected to finalise the guidance on managing the effects on health of incidents where chemicals have been deliberately released; and if this guidance will be made public. [14416]

Mr. Horam: The conference in question was the seminar on responding to the consequences of chemical and biological terrorism. It was sponsored by the United States public health service's office of emergency preparedness and was held at the uniformed services university of health sciences, Bethesda, Maryland. The small working group is aiming to complete its work by the end of July. The intention is to distribute the guidance to the national poisons information service and those who need it in the national health service, including public health and accident and emergency departments.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14799]

Mr. Horam: Postcode areas are used in the analysis of data collected centrally in order to identify the health authority or local authority to which the data relates. The national health service uses a patient's postcode to identify which health authority is responsible for funding health care. Different data sets are reviewed on a regular basis, when the business need for the information is fully considered.

Neither the Department of Health nor any of its agencies use postcode data in formulae for the distribution of grants or awards.

GP Fundholder Appeals

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of GP fundholder appeals to the Department of Health in protest against the budgets allocated to them by health authorities between 1990–91 and 1995–96 were upheld. [14846]

Mr. Malone: Until April 1996, regional health authorities were statutorily responsible for determining general practitioner fundholder budgets. There was no formal right of appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State against these budgets.

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research trials for the licensing of the drug Lariam were carried out on *(a)* women, other than service personnel, and *(b)* tourists going to countries subject to malaria, before the licensing of the drug in 1990; and what trials have been conducted subsequently, indicating the dates. [15195]

Mr. Malone: As for other medicines, information from research trials of Lariam (mefloquine) held by the Licensing Authority is confidential. Section 118 of the Medicines Act 1971 precludes the disclosure of confidential information received in pursuance of the Act.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlie the delay in publication of the Malaria Advisory Committee's new guidelines for the use of Lariam; what is the revised date of publication; and if he will make a statement. [15196]

Mr. Horam: The United Kingdom malaria guidelines are prepared by an informal group of experts. This group has no statutory status. We have been advised that this group of experts is preparing new guidelines. The consultation process is taking longer than anticipated. Publication will take place as soon as possible following finalisation of the consultation process.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence his Department has evaluated concerning the number and proportion of patients prescribed Lariam who visit overseas countries where malaria is prevalent and subsequently *(a)* contract malaria and *(b)* incur (i) severe and (ii) non-severe side-effects of the drug. [15192]

Mr. Horam: The number of cases of falciparum malaria reported in the United Kingdom since 1987 are given in the table. The table is subdivided to give the chemoprophylactic regimen stated in each case but information on compliance with this regimen is not available, nor is information on the number of people taking each different malaria prophylactic regimen.

Cases of falciparum malaria—excluding mixed infections—by stated chemoprophylactic regimen, reported in the United Kingdom to the Malaria Reference Laboratory:

	Mefloquine	*Proguanil and Chloroquine*	*Other*	*None*	*Unknown*	*Total*
1987	0	61	166	304	165	696
1988	0	138	256	407	224	1,025
1989	1	144	251	378	296	1,070
1990	1	162	169	452	275	1,059

	Mefloquine	Proguanil and Chloroquine	Other	None	Unknown	Total
1991	1	265	186	529	287	1,268
1992	4	168	102	422	239	935
1993	3	180	129	474	262	1,048
1994	16	114	109	541	398	1,178
1995	28	96	97	492	399	1,112
1996[1]	35	136	119	514	464	1,268

[1] 1996 data are provisional.

There are several possible reasons for the changes in the number of cases of malaria occurring with the different prophylaxis regimens. The number of cases may rise either because of increasing resistance by the malaria parasites or because more of the drug is being used and they may fall because of better compliance or because the drug is used by fewer people.

As for any licensed medicine, the Medicines Control Agency evaluates reports of suspected adverse drug reactions associated with Lariam (mefloquine) from the yellow card reporting scheme. However, often full details of the degree of the severity of side effects are not reported. In addition, worldwide information on adverse drug reactions from published literature, post-marketing studies and safety reports provided by the manufacturer are also evaluated, in order to ensure that the benefits of mefloquine in treating and preventing malaria outweigh the risks of developing an adverse drug reaction.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the scientific reports, with dates of publication, which provided the basis for granting a licence for the sale of Lariam in 1990 and *(b)* the scientific reports published since 1990 which are relevant to that licence. [15194]

Mr. Malone: The decision to grant a licence for Lariam was based on all the available evidence, published or unpublished and whether or not favourable to the application. The data submitted by the company was assessed by the Medicines Control Agency, which sought the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines, the Government's independent safety experts. The CSM were satisfied as to the safety, quality and efficacy of the product, the sole criteria under the Medicines Act 1968.

A large number of scientific reports are published relating to authorised medicines. As for all medicines, the Medicines Control Agency continuously reviews the published scientific reports in conjunction with other evidence that becomes available to ensure that the benefits of use outweigh the risk of developing adverse reactions.

Iron Deficiency (Children)

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding iron deficiency in children; and if he will make a statement. [14996]

Mr. Horam: We have received one letter since the beginning of the year. The prevalence of anaemia, which is the clinical manifestation of iron deficiency, has been monitored among young children by the "National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS) of Children Aged 1½ to 4½ years" published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1995. Seven per cent. of males and 9 per cent. of females aged one and a half to four and a half years had haemoglobin levels less than 11g/dl.

On 2 January 1997, fieldwork for the NDNS of young people aged four to 18 years started. This will include measures of iron status. The joint Department of Health–Medical Research Council nutrition research programme will be funding research to help develop better measures of iron status.

The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy has agreed to convene an expert group to assess the iron status of the population. The group has not yet started work.

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists appeared before an NHS tribunal on the grounds that they breached their terms of service in each year since 1990. [15071]

Mr. Malone: Information is not collected centrally. However, details of the total number of cases, for all practitioners, is published in the annual report of the Council on Tribunals, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column 767, how many deaths from food poisoning occurred in 1996 by category. [15136]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not yet available.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* dysentery and *(b)* food poisoning there were in (i) York, (ii) North Yorkshire, (iii) Yorkshire and (iv) England in 1996. [15198]

Mr. Horam: Data on the number of cases of food poisoning and dysentery notified to the Office for National Statistics for 1996 are not yet available. Provisional figures for the first two quarters of 1996 have been published in "Quarterly Monitor (Series MB2) for Infectious Diseases" and copies are available in the Library. Provisional figures for the third quarter have been placed in the Library.

Eye Disease Treatment

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued on the availability of the Excimer process to improve vision and laser eye surgery to treat eye disease in the NHS. [15433]

Mr. Horam: It is for health authorities to decide what services should be made available to their residents following an assessment of their needs.

Pepper Gas

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment of the health effects of pepper gas and the possible carcinogenic effects of capsaicin, has been made by the senior medical officers of the Department of Health since 1991; how many published and internal papers have been written by the Department's medical officers on this subject since 1991; and what are the current security classifications of these reports. [14385]

Mr. Horam: A single report on pepper spray was prepared by the Department of Health in 1993. This is unclassified. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Skin Diseases

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people *(a)* were treated for and *(b)* died from (i) skin cancer and (ii) other skin-related ailments in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [15335]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of people treated for skin cancer is not available. Data on deaths certified as due to malignant melanoma of the skin (ICD* 172) and other skin cancer (ICD*173), as well as deaths from non-cancerous skin diseases (ICD*680–709), can be found in table 2 of the Office for National Statistics annual publication "Mortality statistics: cause", series DH2, numbers 18 and 19 (for 1991 and 1992) and in tables 3 and 4 of "Mortality statistics: cause" 1993 (revised) and 1994, series DH2, number 21. Copies are available in the Library.

Research Units

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total funding which each of the research units, funded by his Department, will receive from his Department in 1996–97; and if he will place a copy of each unit's programme of work in the Library and give the start and end dates of each unit's new contract. [15445]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is in the table.

Unit	*Allocation 1996–97 £000*	*New Contract start date*	*End date*
Dartington Social Research Unit (University of Bristol)	565	January 1996	December 2000
Personal Social Services Research Unit (University of Kent)	1,230	April 1996	March 2001
Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit (University of London)	429	January 1996	December 2000
Clinical Operational Research Unit (University of London)	210	January 1996	December 2000
Social Medicine and Health Services Research Unit (University of London)	478	January 1996	December 2000
Thomas Coram Research Unit (University of London)	702	January 1996	December 2000
National Primary Care Research and Development Centre (University of Manchester)	1,550	January 1995	December 2004
National Institute for Social Work (University of Manchester)	417	January 1996	December 2000
Childhood Cancer Research Group (University of Oxford)	372	April 1996	December 2000
National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit (University of Oxford)	728	January 1996	December 2000
Medical Care Research Unit (University of Sheffield)	333	January 1996	December 2000
Centre for Health Economics (University of York)	338	August 1996	July 2001
Social Policy Research Unit (University of York)	417	January 1996	December 2000

Programmes of work will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the funding allocated by his Department for research into skin diseases for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [15270]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health policy research programme has provided funding for research on skin cancer only in each of the last five years as follows:

Years	*£000*
1992–93	0
1993–94	31
1994–95	84
1995–96	75
1996–97	339
1997–98[1]	464

[1] Estimate.

Mental Health

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of registered mentally handicapped people in community care in each council area in England; and if he will make a statement. [15319]

Mr. Burns: Information is not collected centrally on the number of registered people with learning disabilities—mental handicap—in community care in each council area. The prevalence of severe learning disability in England is estimated as being in the order of three to four per 1,000 members of the general population. The majority live in the community and will receive varying levels of support from the statutory authorities.

Skin Ailments

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the funding allocated for research into psoriasis for each of the last five years for which figures are available, and if he will make a statement. [15269]

Mr. Horam: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Trade and Industry. In 1995–96, the MRC gave a project grant of £30,000 to Glasgow university for its "Molecular Genetic Analysis of Familial Psoriasis" project.

The MRC is an independent body deciding what research to support on its own expert judgment. The council is always willing to consider soundly based scientific proposals in competition with other applications.

The national health service research and development health technology assessment programme has recently issued a call for proposals for a systematic review of different treatments for severe psoriasis.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by health authority area the number of patients treated for skin ailments in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [15334]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health does not collect figures on the numbers of patients treated for a condition or range of conditions. Figures are collected on the number of finished consultant episodes by specific medical condition. These are available from the annual hospital episode statistics published by the Department of Health, copies of which are available in the Library.

Sheffield Health Authority

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much public money was allocated to Sheffield health authority in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996–97. [15340]

Mr. Horam: The cash limit for Sheffield area health authority in 1979–80 is not directly comparable with that for Sheffield health authority in 1996–97 due to the reorganisation of the national health service. The final cash limit for Sheffield area health authority in 1979–80 was £79.177 million. The current cash limit for Sheffield health authority in 1996–97 is £367.130 million.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many junior doctors in England are routinely working hours above those set out in the "new deal". [15907]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 January 1996, columns *767-68*.

Blood

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much blood from the national transfusion service was sold to the private sector in 1995 and 1996. [15502]

Mr. Horam: Blood itself is never sold, although a handling charge is made to hospitals, whether private or national health service, to cover the costs of collecting, testing, processing and delivery blood. Information about the amount of blood supplied to the private sector is not available centrally.

WALES

Health Service Staff

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses were employed in NHS hospitals in (i) Clwyd and (ii) Powys in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [14890]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the following table. Data for 1990 to 1992 are available only for each former health authority area as a whole while data for later years are shown by individual NHS trusts within the authority boundary. The small number of nursing and midwifery staff employed by North Wales health authority cannot be split into the former Clwyd and Gwynedd authorities. As information for nursing staff working in hospitals is not available separately, total nursing and midwifery staff numbers are given.

Whole-time equivalent number of staff in post at 30 September.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Nursing and Midwifery Staff[1]							
Clwyd:							
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	—	—	—	1,537	1,523	1,415	1,446
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	—	—	—	870	881	893	932
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	—	—	—	837	861	887	921
Clwyd Health Authority	3,174	3,270	3,347	83	84	65	—
North Wales Health Authority	—	—	—	—	—	—	10
Powys:							
Powys Healthcare NHS Trust	—	—	—	1,009	995	914	944
Powys Health Authority	1,059	1,084	1,044	1	—	—	—
Hospital Medical Staff[2]							
Clwyd:							
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	—	—	—	40	44	42	48
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	—	—	—	150	160	170	165
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	—	—	—	140	141	146	154
Clwyd Health Authority	284	291	306	—	—	—	—
Powys:							
Powys Healthcare NHS Trust	—	—	—	32	33	32	37
Powys Health Authority	32	29	33	1	—	—	—

[1] Excluding pre-registration learners.
[2] Data for 1996 is provisional.

Salmon

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of reports prepared by *(a)* the National Rivers Authority and *(b)* the Environment Agency on the impact of drift net fishing off the west coast of Ireland on the salmon population in Wales. [15133]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Reports by the National Rivers Authority and the Environment Agency on the impact of the Irish drift net fishery on salmon stocks in Welsh and English rivers form part of the assessment work being carried out by a joint working party made up of Government fisheries scientists, the Environment Agency and the Irish Department of the Marine. This group is expected to report before the end of the year.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in respect of the impact of driftnet fishing in the Irish Sea on the number of salmon returning to Welsh rivers; and if he will make a statement. [15135]

Mr. Evans: In the period since June 1995, several representations have been received from Welsh salmon fishery organisations and other interested bodies about the impact of the Irish driftnet fishery on salmon in Welsh and English rivers.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the impact on Welsh rivers of drift netting in the Irish sea. [15066]

Mr. Evans: Recent reports indicate that the Irish driftnet fishery does exploit salmon originating from some rivers in Wales and England. The Irish Government have implemented some measures intended to reduce levels of exploitation in the driftnet fishery. Further work to evaluate the levels of exploitation is being carried out by a joint working group which includes the Irish Department of the Marine. The group is expected to report before the end of the year.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact on Welsh rivers of the recent measures introduced by the Irish Government relating to fishing in the North sea. [15068]

Mr. Evans: It is too early to assess the likely impact of recent measures introduced by the Irish Government to restrict salmon exploitation by commercial netsmen. The situation will be closely monitored.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on trends in the numbers of salmon and trout in Welsh rivers over the last 10 years. [15067]

Mr. Evans: Catch data provide an approximate index of the abundance of salmon and migratory trout entering Welsh rivers. Over the 10 year period to 1995 there is evidence of a decline in the declared catches of both these species.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on proposals for confining salmon netting within river headlands. [15237]

Mr. Evans: The Environment Agency's salmon management strategy states that exploitation of salmon should take place, as far as possible, where the stock is from a single river. In Wales, the Environment Agency has applied this principle by introducing measures which aim to phase out salmon netting outside river headlands.

Power Stations

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the environmental impact of the *(a)* PowerGen and *(b)* National Power power stations in Connah's quay, Deeside. [15148]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Environment Agency monitors the impact of emissions on the local environment. The integrated pollution control register, held by the relevant regional and area offices of the Environment Agency, contains information about each authorisation issued and the results of monitoring required under the terms of the authorisation.

Air Pollution

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to reduce air pollution. [15141]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government have put in place a number of mechanisms to control pollution which apply throughout the UK. The Environment Act 1990 introduced two systems for controlling polluting emissions from industry: integrated pollution control, which limits emissions to all environmental media from large installations; and local air pollution control, covering emissions to air from small and medium sized plant.

The draft UK national air quality strategy, issued in August 1996, sets out the Government's proposals for air quality policy and includes standards and objectives for all the main air pollutants. The Strategy builds on the requirements of the Environment Act 1995 which includes a new system of local air quality management. Under the Act, local authorities will be required to review and assess air quality in their areas. We are preparing guidance for local authorities to assist them with their new air quality management duties.

Roseate Tern

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment has he made of the numbers of roseate tern in Wales over the last 10 years; what plans he has to encourage the growth of the roseate tern population in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [15062]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Roseate tern numbers are counted annually. The last 10 years data show that numbers have declined to virtual extinction within Wales and an action plan under the biodiversity programme will be prepared.

Child Care

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the provision of child care facilities for *(a)* students and *(b)* staff in further and higher education in Wales; [15130]

(2) what assessment he has made of the organisation and financing of child care facilities in further and higher education in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [15069]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: None. The provision of child care facilities for students and staff in further and higher education is a matter for individual institutions.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the adequacy of provision of *(a)* short-term sessional and *(b)* out of school child care schemes for (i) staff and (ii) students at further and higher education establishments in Wales. [15061]

Mr. Evans: It is for individual further and higher education institutions to assess the adequacy of child care provision for their staff and students in the light of patterns of recruitment and retention, and the availability of resources.

Health Authority Finance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to announce the final allocation of finance for health authorities in Wales for 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [15394]

Mr. Hague: I will announce the 1997–98 health authority allocations very shortly.

Osiris Network

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answers of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *757*, if Siemens Business Services gave a discount to his Department on computer hardware under the Osiris contract as a consequence of its receipt of the old computer hardware stock of his Department [15690]

Mr. Hague: No. The Osiris contract is for the provision of services, not for the supply of hardware.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answers of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *757*, what consultations he had with *(a)* education institutions and *(b)* training and enterprise councils before the decision to dispose of his Department's computer hardware stock via Siemens Business Services. [15691]

Mr. Hague: None. Some of the equipment is in use within the Welsh Office and will remain so, managed under the Osiris contract. The majority of the personal computers are obsolete, and it would be difficult or impossible to maintain them.

The equipment does not belong to the Welsh Office: the transfer of assets formed part of the Osiris contract and was reflected in the pricing structure of the contract. Siemens Business Services and the Welsh Office have a joint review process to make sure that the more recent equipment will be redeployed in the most cost-effective way, taking account of the constraints of existing software licences and of security issues. Where possible, Siemens Business Services will use the present computer hardware and peripherals as part of, or in support of the Osiris system. Where this is not possible, the equipment wil be made secure for disposal: this entails removing all hard disk drives and software. Any subsequent user would have to purchase new items to replace these. The method of disposal will depend upon the type and age of the equipment, but might include transfer to educational or training bodies where appropriate.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information is available from his Department to grant-maintained schools on *(a)* addresses of potential pupils in the school's neighbourhood and elsewhere, *(b)* sources of finance and *(c)* the nursery voucher scheme. [15582]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Department does not collect names and addresses of pupils/potential pupils of any schools in Wales. Grant-maintained schools are informed of the grants available from the Department for capital and revenue purposes related to the school. No information as to sources of external funding is given.

In connection with the nursery voucher scheme, grant-maintained primary schools have been sent directly the detailed guide for providers; its update, the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales. "Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning Before Compulsory School Age"; a provider application form and copies of the "Basic Facts for Parents" leaflet. Grant-maintained schools registered for the scheme will also be receiving a registered providers' pack, which will include advice on the interaction of voucher income with their existing funding arrangements. Grant-maintained schools, along with other providers, can also contact the nursery voucher helpline or the department for further advice.

North Gwent Mental Health Project

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of the north Gwent mental health private finance initiative project. [15689]

Mr. Hague: Gwent Community Health NHS trust, with the agreement of Gwent health authority, is discussing a revised, small scheme with the private sector following concerns expressed by local general practitioners about the original proposals.

Chief Inspector of Schools

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who is to be appointed as chief inspector in the office of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales, following the retirement of Mr. R. L. James. [16093]

Mr. Hague: By Order in Council, which will be laid before the House in the normal way, Miss Susan Lewis has been appointed chief inspector. She will take up her post on 1 June.

Police Forces (Finance)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact on

council tax rates in Wales of the revenue and capital settlements for 1997–98 for Welsh police forces; and if he will make a statement. [14138]

Mr. Hague: For 1997–98, the proportion of settlement spending met by central Government support has increased. This means that the proportion to be met by council tax has decreased. The actual level of council tax set by police authorities will depend on the extent to which they budget above my plans.

Driftnet Fishing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has made to the Irish Government concerning the potential impact of the changes in driftnet fishing regulations on Welsh anglers; and if he will make a statement. [15138]

Mr. Hague: None. I welcome the changes recently announced by the Irish Government on new driftnet fishing regulations which are intended to reduce the level of exploitation of salmon.

DEFENCE

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many full-time soldiers there are in the Royal Irish Regiment; and how many of these serve only in Northern Ireland. [15470]

Mr. Soames: The number of full-time trained personnel serving with the Royal Irish Regiment on 1 January 1997 was 3,540.

	Officers	*Soldiers*	*Total*
Royal Irish General Service	119	614	733
Royal Irish Home Service	101	2,706	2,807
Total	220	3,320	3,540

The RIHS serve only in Northern Ireland.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the proposal from Belarus and Ukraine for a central and eastern European nuclear free zone at the 1995 extension and review conference of the non-proliferation treaty as an alternative to the eastwards expansion of NATO; and if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's response to the proposal. [15332]

Mr. David Davis: I have been asked to reply.

As my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development stated in another place on 18 June 1996, column 22, NATO countries continue to believe that nuclear deterrence makes an essential contribution to preserving peace and stability in Europe. We have made our position clear to both the Ukrainians and the Belarusians. However, NATO Foreign Ministers announced on 10 December 1996 that NATO had no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1995, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14943]

Mr. Freeman: Within the Cabinet Office, the Office of Public Service has responsibility for improving the efficiency of Government and public services for deregulation and for the competitiveness agenda. Clearly, the success of the Government's policies on competitiveness and deregulation impacts on small businesses in the Bournemouth area. Similarly, the citizens charter initiative also impacts on the public services in the area. In 1995, Dorset Health Care NHS trust was awarded a chartermark for its service to the community.

Notes on Clauses

Dr. Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will assess the advantages of publishing the notes on clauses relating to Bills. [15230]

Mr. Freeman: The notes on clauses prepared for Ministers taking a Bill through the House are, by convention, usually also made available to members of the relevant Standing Committee and to other interested Members. They are not formally published, but are in the public domain and copies can be made available to others on request.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what *(a)* controls, *(b)* monitoring and *(c)* guidance exist in respect of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [15610]

Mr. Freeman: Non-departmental public bodies are established to operate at arm's length from Government, often under specific statutory powers. An NDPB's governing board is responsible for the management and control of the body's functions.

Ministers and their Departments are responsible for monitoring the performance of the NDPBs they sponsor, and for ensuring that they operate within the framework of controls set out in the Treasury and Cabinet Office guidance "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments".

Guidance on best practice on the procurement and management of external consultants is contained in the efficiency unit scrutiny report, "The Government's Use of External Consultants", which is available to all NDPBs.

House of Commons Disqualification Act

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for what purpose it is proposed to alter part IV of schedule 1 of the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 to provide for the omission from the schedule of Her Majesty's lord-lieutenant or lieutenant for an island area in Scotland. [15575]

Mr. Bates: Under the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994, all lieutenancy areas in Scotland became known as "areas" rather than "island areas" or "regions", with the exception of the four city areas. The amendments proposed to part IV of schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act reflect this and propose consolidating the disqualification provisions relating to lord-lieutenants and lieutenants for island areas in Scotland and lord-lieutenants and lieutenants for the Scottish regions under a single entry. The existing entry of Her Majesty's lord-lieutenant and lieutenant for an island area in Scotland could therefore be removed from the schedule.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for what reasons the proposed amendment to part I of schedule 1 of the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 does not add the office of recorder or part-time recorder. [15576]

Mr. Bates: The House has accepted, for many years, the position whereby hon. and right hon. Members may also serve as recorders or assistant recorders. It has long been recognised that it is not only compatible with being a Member of Parliament to practice some other profession or occupation, but that it can be a positive advantage both to the individual Member and to the House as a whole.

Those hon. and right hon. Members who are recorders or assistant recorders, however, do not by custom either sit in their constituencies or hear cases remitted from their constituencies.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which offices of Her Majesty's lord-lieutenant or lieutenant are existing offices of disqualification under the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975; and what is the geographical jurisdiction of those offices. [15577]

Mr. Bates: Part IV of schedule 1 to the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 lists the offices of Her Majesty's lord-lieutenants and lieutenants whose holders are currently disqualified from becoming Members of the House of Commons. The jurisdiction of these offices extend to the county, area or city for which the lord-lieutenant is appointed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hepatitis B Vaccination

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the level of incidence of liver diseases in children; what proposals he has to incorporate hepatitis B vaccination in the immunisation programme; and if he will make a statement. [14681]

Sir John Wheeler: Information on the incidence of liver disease is not available. However, 43 cases involving persons aged under 16 years were treated in hospital for liver conditions during the year 1995–96. Current policy is to recommend immunisation against hepatitis B in individuals who are at increased risk of hepatitis B because of their lifestyle, occupation or other factors such as close contact with a case or carrier. Any changes in this policy would depend on the advice of the joint committee on vaccination and immunisation which advises all four UK health Departments on matters concerning immunisation.

Regent House Grammar School, Newtownards

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the proposals to extend Region House grammar school, Newtownards. [14682]

Mr. Ancram: Plans to extend and refurbish the existing school premises are being taken forward by the South-Eastern education and library board. The scheme is approaching final sketch plan stage and, when it has reached that stage, it can be considered for a place in the school building programme in light of the resources available.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many cold weather payments have been made in Northern Ireland during the current winter broken down by the station involved in triggering the payment; [14899]

(2) if he will list the cost of cold weather payments and the number of recipients of the payments for each weather station in Northern Ireland in each year since 1986; [14900]

(3) if he will list the weather stations in Northern Ireland which provide data used in determining cold weather payments. [14898]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 11 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about Cold Weather Payments.

There are four Meteorological Office sites in Northern Ireland which supply the data used to determine if a cold weather period has been recorded or is forecast. They are located in Aldergrove and Lisburn, County Antrim, Carmoney, County Londonderry and St. Angelo, County Fermanagh.

Since the Agency was established in July 1991, the first cold weather period was triggered in the winter of 1995. Unfortunately, statistics on the number and cost of cold weather payments are not available in the format requested and to obtain this information would involve an extensive clerical exercise at a disproportionate cost. I can provide, however, the number of computer issued payments for each Social Security Office in 1995/96 and to date in 1996/97. Tables are attached showing these figures. Statistics on the clerically issued payments are not available.

The total number of Cold Weather Payments issued in Northern Ireland so far this winter is 134,288 which equates to a cash figure of £1,141,448.

I hope this explains the position for you but I would be happy to provide any further information you require.

Northern Ireland cold weather payment volumes 95–96
Computer issued payments
Income support customers

Social security office	Number of payments	Cash total (£)
Antrim	3,212	27,302.00
Armagh	3,378	28,713.00
Ballymena	3,667	31,169.50
Ballymoney	2,700	22,950.00
Ballynahinch	1,184	10,064.00
Banbridge	2,412	20,502.00
Bangor	2,986	25,381.00
Carrickfergus	1,671	14,203.50
Coleraine	3,413	29,010.50
Cookstown	2,508	21,318.00
Downpatrick	1,829	15,546.50
Dungannon	4,144	35,224.00
Enniskillen	5,221	44,378.50
Larne	1,723	14,645.50
Limavady	2,165	18,402.50
Lisburn	3,845	32,682.50
Folye	7,099	60,341.50
Lurgan	3,872	32,912.00
Magherafelt	3,349	28,466.50
Newcastle	1,241	10,548.50
Newry	6,761	57,468.50
Newtownards	2,930	24,905.00
Omagh	3,789	32,206.50
Portadown	2,819	23,961.50
Strabane	4,224	35,904.00
Kilkeel	1,154	9,809.00
Shaftesbury Square	3,443	29,265.50
Corporation Street	7,579	64,421.50
Shankill	3,441	28,398.50
Knockbreda	3,938	33,473.00
Falls Road	5,611	47,693.50
Holywood Road	5,386	45,781.00
Newtownabbey	3,343	28,415.50
Andersonstown	5,449	46,316.50
Lisnagelvin	3,472	29,512.00

Northern Ireland cold weather payment volumes 96–97
Computer issued payments
Jobseeker's allowance customers

Social security office	Number of payments	Cash total (£)
Antrim	31	263.50
Armagh	21	178.50
Ballymena	20	170.00
Ballymoney	4	34.00
Ballynahinch	12	102.00
Banbridge	9	76.50
Bangor	29	246.50
Carrickfergus	7	59.50
Coleraine	0	Nil
Cookstown	15	127.50
Downpatrick	11	93.50
Dungannon	30	255.00
Enniskillen	56	476.00
Larne	27	229.50
Limavady	3	25.50
Lisburn	16	136.00
Folye	0	Nil
Lurgan	26	221.00
Magherafelt	22	187.00
Newcastle	14	119.00
Newry	42	357.00
Newtownards	20	170.00
Omagh	39	331.50
Portadown	15	127.50
Strabane	44	374.00

Northern Ireland cold weather payment volumes 96–97
Computer issued payments
Jobseeker's allowance customers

Social security office	Number of payments	Cash total (£)
Kilkeel	19	161.50
Shaftesbury Square	12	102.00
Corporation Street	33	280.50
Shankill	22	187.00
Knockbreda	18	153.00
Falls Road	12	102.00
Holywood Road	33	280.50
Newtownabbey	26	221.00
Andersonstown	30	255.00
Lisnagelvin	0	Nil

Northern Ireland cold weather payment volumes 96–97
Computer issued payments
Income support customers

Social security office	Number of payments	Cash total (£)
Antrim	3,208	27,268.00
Armagh	3,916	33,286.00
Ballymena	3,687	31,339.50
Ballymoney	580	4,930.00
Ballynahinch	1,209	10,276.50
Banbridge	2,415	20,527.50
Bangor	3,144	26,724.00
Carrickfergus	1,722	14,637.00
Coleraine	38	323.00
Cookstown	5,027	42,729.50
Downpatrick	1,883	16,005.50
Dungannon	8,565	72,802.50
Enniskillen	10,253	87,150.50
Larne	1,718	14,603.00
Limavady	1,215	10,242.50
Lisburn	3,938	33,473.00
Foyle	0	NIL
Lurgan	4,027	34,229.50
Magherafelt	4,102	34,867.00
Newcastle	1,298	11,033.00
Newry	6,871	54,403.50
Newtownards	3,075	26,137.50
Omagh	7,790	66,215.00
Portadown	2,954	25,109.00
Strabane	8,673	73,720.50
Kilkeel	1,163	9,885.50
Shaftesbury Square	3,572	30,362.00
Corporation Street	7,992	67,932.00
Shankill	3,446	29,291.00
Knockbreda	4,084	34,714.00
Falls Road	5,960	50,660.00
Holywood Road	5,432	46,172.00
Newtownabbey	3,544	30,124.00
Andersonstown	5,907	50,209.50
Lisnagelvin	801	6,808.50

Moseys Arch, Killyleagh

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who owns the footway and steps known as Moseys arch between High street and Frederick street in Killyleagh, County Down; how many and which people have made representations to the Housing Executive to have this public right-of-way closed by initiating an extinguishing order; and if he will make a statement. [14840]

Sir John Wheeler: I am advised that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive owns most of the footway and steps known as Mosey's arch, but part of the land may be in private ownership.

The Housing Executive has also advised that the initial request for an extinguishment order came from the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Since then, both the Department and the Housing Executive have received further representations from local residents in support of, or in opposition to, the extinguishment of the right of way.

The next stage in the process is for the Housing Executive to try to resolve the objections. If that proves impossible, the matter will be referred to the Department, which may then decide to hold a public local inquiry to hear the objections to the extinguishment order.

Stalking

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many groups and individuals responded to the consultation paper on stalking and if he will list them; and how many and which proposed separate legislation for Northern Ireland. [14836]

Sir John Wheeler: Responses were received from 11 groups, none of which proposed separate legislation for Northern Ireland. They were:

Democratic Unionist Party

Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights

Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation

Soroptimist International of Dungannon

Soroptimist International of Downpatrick

Soroptimist International of Bangor

Women's Forum Northern Ireland

Police Federation for Northern Ireland

The Queen's University of Belfast, Faculty and School of Law

Probation Board for Northern Ireland.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulae for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14804]

Sir John Wheeler: In Northern Ireland, the Department of Health and Social Services collects data broken down by postcode area in relation to patient treatment and the processing of benefit claims. This provides the basis of aggregation for research and issues which have a geographic dimension. Postcodes are used by the Social Security Agency in delineating which areas qualify for special cold weather payments to the elderly. The delineation of areas is reviewed each year.

The Training and Employment Agency collects most of its programme monitoring data on the basis of postcodes. This process has recently been introduced and therefore has not yet been reviewed.

The Department of the Environment uses postcode areas for the selection of sampling points for the measurement of drinking water quality and radon levels, and for the collection of data on retail outlet usage, urban development grant and the "Making Belfast Work" initiative. The use of postcode areas for these purposes has not been reviewed.

Drinks Licences

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the numbers of drinks licences in Northern Ireland presently in existence, by type, and specify the annual income received from issue of these licences and the costs of their administration in the last year for which figures are available. [14841]

Sir John Wheeler: For the period ended 31 December 1995, the last complete year for which figures are available, the number of drink licences in force in Northern Ireland, by type, was as follows:

Category of licence	*Number of licences*
Public houses	1,642
Off licences	322
Hotels	150
Restaurants	294
Place of public entertainment	10
Refreshment room in public transport premises	13
Seamen's canteen	3
Non-seagoing vessel	1

Figures supplied by the Northern Ireland Court Service indicate that a total of £742,559 in fees income was derived from the issue of licences and their associated applications during the financial year April 1995 to March 1996. This total is made up as follows:

Magistrates court: £692,109

County court: £50,450.

I am advised that the cost of administering the grant and renewal of liquor licences is part of the overall cost of civil business in the county and magistrates courts. Costs as between the different types of civil business are not maintained.

Building Societies and Banks (Employees)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons are employed by *(a)* the Irish Permanent building society, *(b)* the National bank, *(c)* the First National building society, and *(d)* the ICS building society; and how many employees in each of these companies are perceived to be (i) Roman Catholic and (ii) Protestant. [15320]

Mr. Ancram: Since none of these companies is currently registered with the Fair Employment Commission, the commission has no figure available to show the number of persons employed by the companies or their perceived religion.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons in each parliamentary constituency area in receipt of disability living allowance; [15322]

(2) how many persons in each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* district council area are in receipt of severe disablement allowance; [15326]

(3) how many persons in each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* district council area are in receipt of incapacity benefit; [15330]

(4) how many persons in each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* district council area are in receipt of industrial injuries disablement benefit; [15328]

(5) how many persons in each district council area are in receipt of disability living allowance; [15323]

(6) how many persons in each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* district council area have received social fund maternity payments in each of the last three years; [15327]

(7) how many persons in each *(a)* parliamentary constituency and *(b)* district council area are in receipt of one-parent benefit. [15329]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a response to be given.

Letter from Alec Wylie to Mr. John Taylor, dated 13 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the number of people in receipt of various benefits in each district council area and parliamentary constituency.

I have attached tables showing the number of people in receipt of Severe Disablement Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance in each constituency and district council area. Unfortunately, information on Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, One Parent Benefit and Social Fund Maternity Payments is not held in the format requested.

I hope this explains the position for you but I would be happy to provide any further information you require.

Number of people in receipt of various social security benefits by constituency

Constituency	Severe Disablement Allowance (August 1996)	Incapacity Benefit[1] (August 1996)	Disability Living Allowance (August 1996)
Strangford	652	4,508	4,080
Belfast East	547	3,703	4,213
North Down	646	3,778	3,721
South Down	1,061	6,228	5,980
Lagan Valley	702	4,841	6,063
South Antrim	1,054	4,630	5,025
North Antrim	795	4,731	4,002
East Antrim	677	4,756	4,670
East Londonderry	979	5,399	4,992
Mid-Ulster	1,091	6,910	7,195
Newry and Armagh	1,130	6,352	6,596
Upper Bann	821	6,760	7,256
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	936	4,676	5,327
Foyle	1,243	8,179	10,157
Belfast South	482	3,412	3,822
Belfast West	860	6,350	10,397
Belfast North	745	5,893	7,436
Unknown[2]	624	3,070	3,515

[1] Includes customers in receipt of credits only.

[2] Benefit recipients which cannot be assigned to a particular constituency.

Number of people in receipt of various social security benefits by district council area

District council	Severe disablement allowance (August 1996)	Incapacity Benefit[1] (August 1996)	Disability living allowance (August 1996)
Ards	438	3,256	2,907
Belfast	2,568	18,911	25,363
Castlereagh	439	2,982	3,042
Down	543	3,059	3,293
Lisburn	685	4,634	5,901
North Down	504	2,702	2,598
Antrim	719	2,232	2,732
Ballymena	412	2,710	2,174
Ballymoney	227	1,274	1,136
Carrickfergus	261	1,700	1,657
Coleraine	403	2,166	1,963
Cookstown	286	2,341	2,248
Larne	231	1,514	1,321
Magherafelt	365	2,223	1,811
Moyle	156	747	703
Newtownabbey	520	3,940	4,037
Armagh	593	3,010	3,028
Banbridge	264	2,083	1,806
Craigavon	673	5,467	6,088
Dungannon	446	2,754	3,353
Newry and Mourne	939	5,721	5,703
Derry	1,045	6,779	8,438
Fermanagh	490	1,922	1,985
Limavady	269	1,459	1,564
Omagh	501	2,810	3,049
Strabane	444	2,710	3,313
Unknown[2]	624	3,070	3,547

[1] Includes customers in receipt of credits only.

[2] Benefit recipients which cannot be assigned to a particular district council area.

Handguns

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which type or make of centre-fired pistols or revolvers cannot be readily dismantled; and how many of these are licensed in Northern Ireland. [15247]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government accept that handguns in general can be disassembled with varying degrees of practicability. This will depend not only on the design of the gun but also on the skill and dexterity of the owner. At the end of November 1996, there were 12,808 licensed centre-fire handguns in Northern Ireland.

Department of the Environment (Compensation)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons in each parliamentary constituency have successfully claimed for compensation against the Department of Environment in the last three years; [15324]

(2) how many persons in each district council area have successfully claimed for compensation against the Department of Environment in each of the last three years. [15325]

Sir John Wheeler: It is not feasible to identify claims against the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) by parliamentary or district council area. However, throughout Northern Ireland, the following numbers of claimants against the Department of the Environment were successful.

	Settlements (prior to court hearing)	Court awards	Total
1993–94	936	174	1,110
1994–95	1,256	141	1,397
1995–96	1,029	113	1,142

Hospital and Nursing Home Beds

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each year since 1979 the numbers of *(a)* registered beds and *(b)* occupied beds in (i) registered private hospitals/clinics, (ii) registered private nursing homes and (iii) all registered establishments in Northern Ireland, showing separately those which were for (1) acute specialties, (2) mental illness, (3) people with learning difficulties, (4) people with physical disabilities, (5) maternity and (6) other purposes. [15457]

Sir John Wheeler: Details of occupied beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics are not available centrally. The first table shows the number of available beds in private hospitals and clinics from 1991. These are the earliest dates for which the information is available centrally. These figures do not include bed availability for acute specialties and maternity services provided by private hospitals and clinics, which are not collected centrally.

The second table lists the number of available beds in voluntary and private residential accommodation since 1979 and the numbers of occupied beds in voluntary and private residential accommodation up to and including 1987, the last year for which central figures on occupied beds in this category were collected, other than in the case of children's homes.

Available beds in nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics

	Nursing Homes	Private Hospitals/Clinics
1985	751	—
1986	1,072	—
1987	1,564	—
1988	2,450	—
1989	3,751	—
1990	5,269	—
1991	6,770	78
1992	7,103	78
1993	8,829	78
1994	8,837	78
1995	9,339	78

— not available centrally. Available beds are at 31 December each year up to and including 1991. Thereafter figures refer to the number of available beds at 31 March each year.

Voluntary and private residential accommodation

	Mental illness				Learning disability			
	Voluntary		Private		Voluntary		Private	
	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds
1979	0	0	69	69	0	0	0	0
1980	0	0	69	69	0	0	0	0
1981	0	0	69	69	0	0	0	0
1982	0	0	69	69	0	0	0	0
1983	0	0	69	69	9	7	0	0
1984	4	4	69	67	9	8	0	0
1985	4	3	69	63	9	8	0	0
1986	4	3	58	54	34	25	0	0
1987	4	4	59	42	33	33	12	12
1988–89	0	—	71	—	87	—	28	—
1989–90	0	—	75	—	127	—	138	—
1990–91	63	—	76	—	158	—	193	—
1991–92	75	—	113	—	251	—	124	—
1992–93	177	—	104	—	332	—	284	—
1993–94	261	—	125	—	419	—	308	—
1994–95	275	—	128	—	413	—	244	—
1995–96	259	—	96	—	432	—	250	—

	Physically disabled				Others			
	Voluntary		Private		Voluntary		Private	
	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds
1979	69	25	0	0	1,802	1,473	0	0
1980	69	20	0	0	1,804	1,431	0	0
1981	71	21	0	0	1,838	1,441	0	0
1982	63	17	0	0	1,737	1,408	0	0
1983	63	16	0	0	1,706	1,407	0	0
1984	78	19	0	0	1,643	1,237	0	0
1985	78	15	0	0	1,512	1,223	0	0
1986	56	14	0	0	1,447	1,293	0	0
1987	56	13	0	0	1,399	1,229	0	0
1988–89	51	—	0	0	1,303	151	0	0

	Physically disabled				Others			
	Voluntary		Private		Voluntary		Private	
	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds	Available beds	Occupied beds
1989–90	91	—	0	0	1,152	'148	0	0
1990–91	91	—	0	0	1,107	'142	0	0
1991–92	91	—	0	0	919	'145	0	0
1992–93	83	—	0	0	1,118	'130	0	0
1993–94	79	—	0	0	1,052	'132	0	0
1994–95	62	—	0	0	1,111	'125	0	0
1995–96	62	—	0	0	1,089	'111	0	0

Note:
' From 1988–89 occupancy figures are only available centrally for children's homes.
Information for 1995–96 is provisional.
The "Other" category comprises voluntary and private residential accommodation for the elderly, and voluntary children's homes. Figures are at 31 December each year up to and including 1987. Thereafter figures refer to the average available beds during the year except for children's homes which reflect the position at 31 March each year.

Local Government Finance

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will introduce a relief scheme to assist non-domestic ratepayers whose bills will be increased following revaluation. [16173]

Sir John Wheeler: The Government intend to assist small businesses which have experienced relatively large increases in rateable value. To qualify for relief, a business will have to meet two criteria. First, the net annual value of the property shown in the valuation list on 1 April 1997 must not exceed £10,000. Secondly, the rate bill which would be levied on the property in each of the three years following revaluation must, before any rate relief is applied, be at least 25 per cent. higher than it would have been in that year—the base year—if the revaluation had not taken place.

Relief will be available during the three years 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000. The amount of relief allowed in any individual case will be based on the difference between the rate bill which is actually received by the ratepayer and an amount 25 per cent. or more above the base year amount—the revaluation effect. The full revaluation effect will be abated in the first year of the scheme, two thirds in the second year and one third in the third year. The full rate will be payable in the fourth year after the revaluation.

Rate accounts for 1997–98 will be adjusted before issue to reflect any relief to which ratepayers are entitled. No ratepayer will need to apply for relief under the scheme.

SCOTLAND

Judicial Reviews

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many decisions by his Department were challenged through judicial review in Session 1995–96; and in how many cases *(a)* the Department's decision was upheld by the court, *(b)* the court found for the applicant, *(c)* the Department submitted to the judgment and *(d)* the Department appealed successfully against the judicial review decision. [14374]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: During session 1995–96, 10 decisions were challenged by judicial review in the Court of Session; and *(a)* two decisions were upheld by the court; *(b)* and *(c)*, one of these decisions was not defended by the Secretary of State and accordingly the judicial review petition was successful; and *(d)* none were appealed. Of the remaining seven cases, four judicial review petitions were withdrawn and three are yet to be decided by the court.

Scottish Charities Office

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the powers of the Scottish Charities Office to recover funds which may have been inappropriately used by registered charities. [14925]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Charities Office has no power under the legislation to recover funds. The Court of Session may make an order requiring any bank or other person holding money or securities on behalf of a recognised charity or of any person concerned in its control and management not to part with the money or securities without the court's approval. The full powers of the Court of Session are set out in section 7 of the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Act 1990.

Songbirds

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the summer use of *(a)* organophosphates and *(b)* pyrethroids on the numbers and range of songbirds. [14677]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 12 February 1997]:* The Department of the Environment and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee commissioned a consortium, comprising Oxford University and a number of nature conservation organisations including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, to carry out a review of available information on the indirect effects of pesticides on farmland birds. The results are expected to be published later this year.

Rights of Way

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to strengthen the law in relation to the protection of rights of way in Scotland. [15668]

Mr. Kynoch: The Government wish to promote responsible access to Scotland's countryside and considers that this can better be achieved through voluntary arrangements than by legislation. Established rights of way are already protected in law. In general,

other access issues are better tackled through initiatives such as the access concordat concluded last year, and Scottish Natural Heritage's "Paths for All" project.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he proposes to introduce to ensure the take-up of nursery vouchers in remote areas with small numbers of pre-school children. [15500]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information so far is that take-up of pre-school vouchers in the four pilot areas has been extremely high—over 97 per cent. overall, and higher in the remoter Argyll and Bute and Highland pilot areas. About 93 per cent. of parents with vouchers are also using them. In the pilots, playgroups have often been key providers in rural areas, and we are taking action, specially through activity by national development officers and support to the Scottish Pre-School Play Association, to help rural playgroups meet the stringent quality standards which we require before they may redeem vouchers.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the Stirling university study of pilot nursery voucher schemes about the *(a)* take-up of vouchers and *(b)* availability of nursery places within the scheme in remote areas with small numbers of pre-school children. [15501]

Mr. Robertson: The four pre-school voucher pilot schemes are proving highly successful: over 97 per cent. of parents there have taken up vouchers, and despite a low level of provision before the pilots began, 93 per cent. of these have been able to use them. The formal independent evaluation of the pilots commissioned from Stirling university has, in accordance with my commitments to the House last year, given priority to operational matters. I welcome the December interim report of the evaluation. Although results are as yet provisional, this shows a very positive response from parents, and has enabled us to make some significant improvements to procedures before national implementation. Though the pilots cover a range of rural areas, including Caithness, Badenoch and Strathspey, parts of Argyll and Bute and Arran, the researchers have not yet addressed issues relating to rural provision. They are expected to do so before submitting their final report in August 1997.

Feudal System (Abolition)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Lord Advocate has given approval to the Scottish Law Commission to give high priority in its fifth programme to the abolition of the feudal system; and if he will make a statement. [15495]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Law Commission has been considering abolition of the feudal system as part of its fourth programme of law reform. I understand that my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate has, at my request, said to the Scottish Law Commission that this should be treated as a matter of priority in any fifth programme. Until such time as the Scottish Law Commission's fifth programme of law reform has been presented to Parliament, it would not be proper for me to make a statement on its contents.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has received from the Scottish Law Commission as to the likely time for the receipt of its final recommendations on the abolition of the feudal system. [15496]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I expect the Scottish Law Commission's fifth programme of law reform to be presented to Parliament in the near future. A timetable for the completion of the commission's report on the abolition of the feudal system will be part of the programme but, until such time as the programme has been presented to Parliament, it would not be proper for me to make a statement on its contents.

Fish Farming

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding he is making available for research into the farming of different fish species; where such work is being conducted; and what findings have been received to date. [15497]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Scottish Office spends around £1 million a year at the Marine Laboratory in Aberdeen on research into the farming of different fish species, including the control of diseases and parasites. Research findings are described in the Marine Laboratory's published annual reviews.

European Council

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of European Union Council meetings held in each year from 1979 to 1996, indicating the number *(a)* attended by Ministers from the Scottish Office and *(b)* at which Ministers from the Scottish Office are minuted as having spoken. [13892]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* The information is as follows:

	Total number of Council Ministers meetings[1]	*Scottish Office Minister attendance*
1979	60	—
1980	63	—
1981	62	—
1982	70	—
1983	80	—
1984	80	—
1985	73	—
1986	79	—
1987	81	—
1988	77	5
1989	87	4
1990	91	4
1991	84	5
1992	90	8
1993	98	8
1994	94	8
1995	81	7
1996	88	15

[1] Information obtained from the press office of the Council of the European Union.

Records of the meetings attended by Scottish Office Ministers between 1979 and 1988 were not collated and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The records of Council meetings do not attribute individual contributions.

TREASURY

Income Tax

12. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on income tax levels. [14183]

Mr. Waldegrave: We have received a number of representations welcoming the income tax cuts in the Budget. We now have the lowest headline rate of tax for 60 years and more than a quarter of all taxpayers pay tax at only 20p in the pound.

Tax Allowances (Teachers)

13. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding tax allowances for teachers who carry out work at home. [14184]

Mr. Jack: A limited number of representations have been received from teachers.

Mortgage Tax Relief

14. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to maintain mortgage tax relief at existing levels; and if he will make a statement. [14185]

Mr. Jack: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his 1995 Budget speech, mortgage interest relief will remain unchanged for the lifetime of this Parliament. Beyond that, the level of mortgage interest relief is a matter to be considered each year in the Budget.

Business Investment

16. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about prospects for business investment in 1997. [14187]

Mr. Waldegrave: The prospects for business are excellent. The Government's policies have produced low inflation and steady growth, and low interest and tax rates. Demand has strengthened and profitability is high. The latest CBI and British chambers of commerce surveys show that companies are expecting to increase investment in plant and machinery in 1997. The current climate is one in which businesses can expand and invest with confidence.

Business Taxation

17. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of current levels of business taxation. [14188]

Mr. Jack: In 1995–96, total tax on business raised £63.2 billion, 25 per cent. of total taxes and social security contributions. The UK tax burden on business is the lowest of the major European economies and is among the lowest in the G7. Low tax rates help to make the UK the No. 1 destination for inward investment into the EU.

VAT (Fuel)

18. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenues from VAT on fuel for each of the first two quarters of 1997–98. [14190]

Mr. Oppenheim: No forecasts are made of VAT receipts at this level of disaggregation.

Taxation

19. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact on the United Kingdom economy of the level of taxation in the United Kingdom relative to that in other major EU countries. [14191]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The overall burden of taxation on the economy in the United Kingdom was 35.75 per cent. of GDP in 1995–96. This represents one of the very lowest levels in Europe and is below that of France, Germany and Italy.

The Government are committed to low taxation and a tax system that raises revenue in ways that do least damage to the economy and encourage enterprise.

Investment

20. **Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on current investment levels in the United Kingdom. [14192]

Mrs. Angela Knight: UK businesses have invested more in relation to GDP in the 1990s than in the 1980s, having invested more in the 1980s than in the 1970s. In setting the right climate of low inflation and steady growth, the Government's economic policies are encouraging business to expand and invest with confidence.

Single Currency (Convergence Criteria)

22. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the economic consequences to the United Kingdom of entering a single currency in circumstances when the convergence criteria have not been fully met by each of the participating countries. [14194]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: For the single currency area to be successful, there must be a high degree of sustainable economic convergence among the countries participating. If the single currency were to proceed without reliable convergence, we would not be part of it.

Mortgage Interest Relief

23. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he expects to be the cost of the mortgage interest relief at source scheme in the current year; and if he will make a statement. [14195]

Mr. Jack: In 1996–97, the estimated total cost of mortgage interest relief is about £2.3 billion, of which £2.2 billion is given through the MIRAS scheme.

These figures are provisional. They are based on the assumption, by convention, of no change from the current estimated average building society interest rate of 6.43 per cent.

VAT

24. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's current estimate of revenue from VAT for the current financial year. [14196]

Mr. Oppenheim: The most recent forecast of VAT receipts for 1996–97 published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" is £47.5 billion.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the scope of VAT. [14177]

Mr. Oppenheim: Value added tax in the UK applies to about 60 per cent. of consumer expenditure on goods and services.

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the additional tax that would be raised if VAT were imposed on *(a)* private education fees and *(b)* public health provision charges. [14870]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* Based on information in HM Treasury's "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs", the estimated revenue costs of *(a)* the VAT exemption of private education fees and *(b)* the zero rating of drugs and medicines on prescription are approximately £1,050 million and £750 million respectively in 1996–97. The estimates exclude the effect of behavioural changes and may tend to overestimate the extra revenue from withdrawing the exemption of zero rating.

VAT (Domestic Fuel)

25. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money has been collected by HM Customs and Excise since April 1992 as a result of the extension of VAT to domestic fuel. [14197]

Mr. Oppenheim: Domestic fuel and power has been subject to VAT only since April 1994. The total revenue raised from VAT on domestic fuel and power since the 8 per cent. was introduced is estimated to be as follows:

1994–95: £850 million

1995–96: £1,100 million

Cumulative Debt

26. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cumulative debt as a percentage of gross domestic product of *(a)* Britain and *(b)* other major EU countries. [14198]

Mr. Waldegrave: The Budget forecast of the ratio of gross general Government debt (GGGD) to gross domestic product (GDP) was 55¼ per cent. at end-March 1997. The latest European Commission estimates of the corresponding ratios of GGGD to GDP in Germany, France, Italy and Spain at end-December 1996 are 61½ per cent., 56 per cent., 124½ per cent. and 67¾ per cent. respectively. The European Commission estimates that Luxembourg is the only EU country with a lower ratio of GGGD to GDP than the UK.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's ability to meet stage 3 of EMU. [14174]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I believe that the United Kingdom economy is highly likely to satisfy the economic conditions of low inflation, low fiscal deficit and a low burden of public debt required to contemplate stage 3 of EMU.

VAT (Food)

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the European Community has for the harmonisation of taxation with special reference to VAT on food. [14186]

Mr. Oppenheim: There are no specific EC plans for harmonisation of VAT on food. The European Commission aspires more generally to further harmonisation of VAT rates as part of its suggested programme for a common system of VAT. There are no legislative proposals on rates on the table and the UK's zero rates—including that for food—are fully safeguarded under existing EC agreements. These cannot be changed without our approval.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the real take-home pay of a family on average earnings in *(a)* 1991–92 and *(b)* 1996-97. [14193]

Mr. Jack: Real take-home pay in 1996–97 prices for a family on average earnings around £296.40 per week in 1991–92 and £311.05 per week in 1996–97. This same family should be around £370 better off next year.

UK Economy (Growth Prospects)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the prospects for growth in the United Kingdom economy for the first six months period of the present calendar year, with particular reference to *(a)* consumer spending, *(b)* spending on net new domestic capital formation from all sources and *(c)* the estimated impact of major public sector infrastructure schemes; and if he will make a statement. [14310]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The prospects for growth are excellent. The UK economy is now well into its fifth year of sustained expansion, and all forecasters share the Government's view that 1997 will see another year of healthy growth. Growth is expected to continue to be broadly based, with faster growth in consumers' expenditure, accelerating investment and rising exports. Lower public sector capital expenditure during 1997–98 will be offset by rising capital expenditure under the private finance initiative.

European Single Currency

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of how adherence to the criteria for joining the European single currency would affect the United Kingdom economy. [14175]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Maastricht convergence criteria of low inflation and sound public finances make sound economic sense in their own right, with or without EMU. They will continue to form the basis of the Government's policies to ensure future growth, job creation and rising living standards.

Factor 8 (VAT)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the total revenue raised from the imposition of value added tax on recombinant factor 8 used in the treatment of haemophiliacs. [15386]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 12 February 1997]:* The application of the standard rate of VAT to recombinant factor 8 is common to all manufactured drugs. It is estimated to raise approximately £1 million per year.

Paymaster

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the privatisation of the Paymaster agency. [16092]

Mr. Oppenheim: Conditional agreements for the sale of both the pensions and banking businesses of Paymaster, together with its IT support and its building in Crawley, were exchanged with a joint venture between EDS and Hogg Robinson yesterday. These are subject only to Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment Regulations 1981) consultations, which can begin with the company at once.

The £22.7 million consideration agreed with the purchasers represents a good outcome for the taxpayer. The purchasers have made it clear that they intend to develop the business through the winning of new contracts and the transfer-in of other existing business, and to continue operations from its current Crawley and Basingstoke locations, so the outcome is equally good for the agency's staff and customers.

On the pensions side, the schemes will, of course, continue to be funded and have their rules set by sponsoring Government Departments, which will also remain responsible for ensuring service levels; only the administrative functions are being contracted out to the privatised agency.

On the banking side, I announced on 31 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *255*, the creation of a new Office of HM Paymaster General as a separate statutory body within the National Investment and Loans Office to maintain control over the Paymaster General's accounts at the Bank of England. The privatised agency will supply transaction services to this office on behalf of its departmental and other public sector customers.

I believe that this is an excellent outcome for all. The purchasers are eager to keep the present business intact and to build on the service improvements introduced in recent years by the current management. They bring formidable IT and transaction-processing expertise to support those efforts, combined with a powerful private sector pensions reputation and marketing experience. Paymaster can look forward to becoming a player of repute in the private sector market that was previously closed to it, and customers can expect even higher service levels and more competitive prices in future.

Mersey Docks and Harbour Company

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have for the disposal of their shareholding in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. [15223]

Mr. Jack: The Government own some 12.4 million shares in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, representing around 13.9 per cent. of the company's issued share capital. The Government have no immediate plans for the sale of their holding.

Arms Supplies (Rwanda)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *636–37*, if he will place in the Library copies of pages 2 to 4 of the letter of 30 November 1995 from the chairman of the United Nations special commission on arms supplies to Rwanda to the international liaisons section of United Kingdom Customs and Excise. [14961]

Mr. Oppenheim: The letter of 30 November 1995 indicates that the attachment accompanying the letter was a copy of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1013 (1995). That was the sole content of pages 2 to 4 of the fax. A copy of that resolution is already held in the Library.

"Social Trends" Data

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the tables and graphs in "Social Trends" that make use of data drawn from the general household survey. [14686]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dennis Roberts to Mr. Dafydd Wigley, dated 13 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking for a list of the tables and graphs in *Social Trends* which make use of data drawn from the General Household Survey. The Director has asked me to reply in his absence.

The tables and graphs which use data from the General Household Survey in the 1997 edition of *Social Trends* are shown in the list below.

Number	*Title*
2.2	Households by size
2.3	Households: by type of household and family
2.5	People in households and communal establishments: by type of household and family in which they live
2.9	Families headed by lone parents as a percentage of all families with dependent children
2.10	Percentage of dependent children living in different family types
2.12	Percentage of women cohabiting
2.19	Women remarrying: by year, and length, of separation, 1993–1995
2.28	Contraception: by method used
4.10	Percentage of full-time employees who started their current job in the previous 12 months
5.26	Membership of a current pension scheme: by gender and earnings, 1995–96
6.10	Households with consumer durables
7.4	Chronic sickness: by age, 1974 and 1995–96
7.19	Adult cigarette smoking: by gender
7.22	Consumption of alcohol: by gender 1984 and 1994–95
8.15	Site of NHS GP consultation
8.18	Sight tests: by source of funding and socio-economic group, 1994–95

Number	Title
8.20	Use of selected personal social services: by age, 1994–95
10.2	Owner-occupation: by socio-economic group, 1981 and 1995–96
10.3	Tenure: by age of head of household, 1995–96
10.4	Household composition: by tenure, 1995–96
10.7	Type of dwelling: by tenure, 1995–96
10.8	Type of dwelling: by construction date, 1995–96
10.9	Under-occupation and overcrowding: by type of household, 1995–96
10.15	Length of time at current address: by tenure, 1995–96
13.5	Participation in home-based leisure activities: by gender
13.20	Participation in the most popular sports, games and physical activities: by gender

2001 Census

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the draft religious questions which are being tested for inclusion in the 2001 census are being phrased in such a way as to identify each of the main Christian denominations. [14389]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The question on religious affiliation to be asked in the 1997 census test in England and Scotland will include pre-coded tick-boxes for Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Islam, Jewish and Sikh, but will not identify the main Christian denominations. The census test in Northern Ireland will include a different question, which is worded to meet the local requirements for information, and which does identify the main Christian denominations present in the Province.

The final choice of questions to be included in the census will be made after a full evaluation of the results of the census test, further research, and a further extensive round of consultation. All this information will be taken into account when the Government publish their proposals for questions to be included in the 2001 census in a White Paper in mid-1998. The White Paper will invite comment. The census order paper will be debated in Parliament.

Car Production

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on the United Kingdom's balance of payments of Ford Escort production being transferred overseas. [15099]

Mr. Greg Knight: I have been asked to reply.

Identifying the change in the balance of payments following the transfer of car production overseas would be a major research task, which could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 14 February 1997

ENVIRONMENT

South Yorkshire Supertram

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Government will make additional funds available to local authorities in South Yorkshire to help them to meet the debts and liabilities associated with the south Yorkshire supertram. [16141]

Mr. Curry: The Government are well aware of the exceptional problems facing the South Yorkshire districts and the South Yorkshire passenger transport authority as a result of the loss-making supertram project. We have looked very carefully at this problem and discussed it with representatives of the South Yorkshire districts. We have decided to issue a further £20 million in credit approvals for 1997–98. We are also prepared to issue capitalisation directions if these would help authorities to meet the costs of supertram in 1997–98.

If the districts set budgets above their provisional cap, I will look carefully at all their circumstances before determining a final cap which is reasonable and achievable.

Vacant Local Authority Dwellings

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for vacant local authority dwellings in England. [16265]

Mr. Curry: At 1 April 1996, a total of 79,600 council homes in England were empty, 2.3 per cent. of local authorities' stock. The 1995 figure was 71,800; most of the increase was in "management vacants"—dwellings available for letting immediately or after minor repairs—which account for 60 per cent. of all vacant local authority homes.

I am placing in the Library of the House of Commons a list of local authorities in England ranked on the basis of their management vacants at 1 April 1996.

The Government want to see the best use made of local authorities' housing stock and I look to authorities to continue their efforts to keep their own empty dwellings to a minimum. Most authorities have a good record on filling their vacant dwellings, but there is still room for improvement. The achievements of past years must not be wasted.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the contracts awarded to *(a)* EDS, *(b)* Andersens, *(c)* BMI, *(d)* Capita and *(e)* Sema since 1992, (i) the broad function to be carried out by the contractor, (ii) the value of the contract and (iii) the Department with which the contract was made in each case. [15413]

Mr. Freeman: The total values of contracts placed with the named firms since 1 April 1993 by the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service and its agencies—the Civil Service College, CCTA, Security and Facilities Executive, Property Advisers Civil Estate and the Buying Agency—are listed.

(a) EDS: £2,744

(b) Andersens: £46,575

(c) BMI: Nil

(d) Capita: £85,029

(e) Sema: £22,560.

Information for the period requested prior to this date and details of individual contract values and the functions carried out are available only at disproportionate cost. Information on contracts awarded by other Government Departments is not held by the Cabinet Office.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Genetic Engineering

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report,* columns *719–20,* concerning genetic engineering, if he will list the *(a)* representatives of the animal feed trade, *(b)* food manufacturers, *(c)* retailers and *(d)* consumer organisations involved in the series of meetings on 7 January. [15635]

Mrs. Browning: On 7 January I met representatives from the National Farmers Union, the Grain and Feed Trade Association, the United Kingdom Agricultural Supply Trade Association, the Pet Food Manufacturers Association, Ciba-Geigy, the British Retail Consortium, the Institute of Grocery Distribution, the Food and Drink Federation, the National Association of Master Bakers, ASDA, Marks and Spencer, Safeway, Somerfield, Waitrose, the Consumers Association, the Consumers in Europe Group/National Federation of Consumers Groups, the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland and the National Food Alliance.

A number of other consumer organisations were also invited but were unable to attend.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report,* column *720,* if he will identify the risk associated with the use of Ciba-Geigy's genetically modified maize in an unprocessed form. [15634]

Mrs. Browning: The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes considered that the presence of an antibiotic resistance marker gene with bacterial regulatory sequences in Ciba-Geigy's GM maize presented a small but finite risk of transfer of antibiotic resistance to bacteria in the rumen or gut of animals fed on the unprocessed material. The committee advised that, if transfer were to take place, it could compromise the use of ampicillin and related antibiotics in clinical and veterinary medicine. The three EC scientific committees discussed

the ACNFP's concerns at length before concluding that the risk of transfer occurring was too small to justify banning imports of the GM maize into the Community.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *719–20*, concerning genetic engineering, if he will list the organisations which participated in the consultation meeting on 22 January. [15633]

Mrs. Browning: The consultation meeting to discuss the aspects of biotechnology relating to agriculture and food production, which was chaired by the Earl of Selborne, was attended by the 38 delegates listed, as well as a small number of Government officials. Several other organisations, including the Food and Drink Federation and the National Consumer Council, were also invited but unable to attend.

	Organisations
1. Mr. G. Pykett	Confederation of British Industries
2. Professor R. Righelato	BRFI
3. Mrs. J. Brander	National Council of Women of Great Britain
4. Ms C. Brown	Institute of Grocery Distribution
5. Mrs. J. Nunn	British Retail Consortium
6. Ms S. Davis	Consumer's Association
7. Mr. P Warburlton	Natural Law Party
8. Mrs. H. Millar	ACNFP/University of Edinburgh
9. Miss G. Asbury	Consumers in Europe Group
10. Professor D. Burke	Chair, ACNFP
11. Mr. J. Godfrey	Consumer Panel
12. Dr. G. Schofield	Unilever
13. Professor N. Poole	Zeneca
14. Professor J. Durrant	Science Museum
15. Professor R. Hull	John Innes Centre
16. Professor B. Moseley	ACNFP/Consultant
17. Dr. V. Barber	National Farmers' Union
18. Dr. C. Rawlinson	Home Grown Cereals Authority
19. Mrs. M. Charrington	Horticulture Development Council
20. Professor D. Grierson	Nottingham University
21. Dr. E. Dart	Zeneca Seeds
22. Mr. R. Dyer	British Agro-Chemicals Association
23. Mr. R. Turner	British Society for Plant Breeders
24. Ms J. D'Silva	Compassion in World Farming
25. Mrs. J. MacArthur Clark	Farm Animal Welfare Council
26. Mr. D. Shapiro	Nuffield Council on Bioethics
27. Mrs. H. Browning	Organic farmer
28. Professor B. Miflin	IACR
29. Mr. P Lake	United Kingdom Agricultural Supply Trade Association
30. Professor J. Beringer	Chair, ACRE
31. Dr. M. Rutter	VMD
32. Dr. G Marshall	Scottish Agricultural College
33. Dr. J. Fisher	British Crop Protection Council
34. Dr. S. Mayer	Greenpeace
35. Professor A. Malcolm	Institute of Food Research
36. Professor G. Bulfield	Roslin Research Institute
37. Dr. D. Parr	Greenpeace
38. Mr. R. Maynard	Friends of the Earth

Rabies

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultation he has had with the veterinary profession on possible changes to the United Kingdom's rabies control arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [15939]

Mrs. Browning: None, since the Government's internal consideration of our rabies control policy is still in progress.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14478]

Mr. Howard: In the financial year ending 31 March 1996, 36 staff, equivalent to 15.8 full-time posts, were employed within the Home Office and its agencies specifically to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities at a total salary cost of £463,253. These figures do not include staff, such as legal advisers, who advise on the application of equal opportunities as part of their duties and in relation to whom information is not readily available.

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14950]

Mr. Howard: Since 1979, spending on Dorset police has increased by 112 per cent. in real terms. Next year, 1997–98, Dorset police will be able to increase its spending by 3.9 per cent.—£2.7 million. Spending would then be over 16 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1992–93. By March 1997, it is estimated that there will be 142 more police officers in Dorset than there were in May 1979—19 of whom will have been recruited in 1996–97. Last year, two schemes in Bournemouth won money in the Government's closed circuit television challenge competition: Westbourne core shopping centre, £59,000, and Moordown St. John's Church of England primary school, £5,328. There are now 58 special constables in Bournemouth.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14801]

Mr. Howard: My Department and its agencies by and large do not make regular use of postcodes in the areas of interest. The postcode address file is used as the basis for social and criminal research as and when the need arises. Resource allocation formulae generally use census data at a high level of geographic aggregation and are not dependent on postcode areas. However, some use of the ACORN—a classification of residential neighbourhoods—classification, for which postcodes form the base, is used in the police funding formula which is reviewed regularly. Use has also been made in research of postcodes to convert 1981 census enumeration districts to 1991 census enumeration districts.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many claimants in *(a)* each standard region and *(b)* Great Britain as a whole in each quarter since 1990 were (i) signing on for unemployment-related benefits, (ii) signing on for national insurance credits, (iii) signing on by post for unemployment-related benefits and (iv) signing on by post for national insurance credits. [13588]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The information requested is shown in the following tables.

However, the regular count for the number of postal claimants was suspended during the early months of jobseeker's allowance until claims have been transferred from the old to the new computer system. Arrangements have been made for a special one-off count to be made towards the end of February. Although we expect that the total will be lower, this will not necessarily indicate the number of jobseekers who have changed from postal to fortnightly signing, since it will also reflect moves in and out of unemployment. No figures are available for the number of jobseekers whose status has changed as a result of the new postal rules on signing.

Information is not collected on the number of claimants who sign on by post and receive credits of national insurance contributions only.

All Unemployed Claimants and Unemployed Claimants with no benefit in payment: 1990–1996—Great Britain

	May 90		November 1990		May 1991		November 1991[1]		May 1992		August 1992	
	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB not IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB not IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment
Great Britain	1,432	220	1,559	246	2,048	280	2,313	301	2,546	313	2,641	347
South–East	320	55	382	68	573	92	—	—	808	108	845	120
East Anglia	34	6	39	7	56	9	—	—	74	10	75	11
South West	84	15	101	20	145	22	—	—	196	28	204	31
West Midlands	137	19	150	24	210	28	—	—	263	30	272	34
East Midlands	90	15	97	16	127	17	—	—	162	20	167	22
Yorkshire and Humberside	155	24	164	25	202	26	—	—	227	27	234	30
North West	226	31	230	31	277	31	—	—	317	34	326	38
North	114	16	119	17	139	17	—	—	151	17	152	18
Wales	80	12	87	14	107	14	—	—	120	14	124	15
Scotland	192	26	190	25	212	25	—	—	228	25	242	28

Notes:
[1] Regional analyses from November 1991 data are not available.
Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
Quarterly data is not available prior to May 1992.
Source:
May 1990 to May 1991—5 per cent. sample of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.
November 1991 to November 1994—100 per cent. count of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.
February 1995 to May 1996—5 per cent. of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the Second Thursday of the months shown.
Figures from Department of Social Security.

	November 1992		February 1993		May 1993		August 1993		November 1993	
	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment
Great Britain	2,687	368	2,840	370	2,759	335	2,821	364	2,640	312
South East	876	126	924	128	911	116	932	125	874	104
East Anglia	78	12	85	12	83	11	82	12	77	10
South West	212	34	226	33	211	28	213	31	202	28
West Midlands	275	36	291	38	281	33	287	36	264	31
East Midlands	169	24	181	24	175	23	178	23	166	20
Yorkshire and Humberside	235	30	251	31	242	28	246	31	231	27
North West	320	40	334	40	324	36	330	40	305	34
North	158	20	168	20	166	19	169	20	165	18
Wales	125	16	131	16	126	14	130	16	124	15
Scotland	238	30	249	29	240	27	253	30	233	26

Notes:
Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
Quarterly data is not available prior to May 1992.
Source:
May 1990 to May 1991—5 per cent. sample of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.
November 1991 to November 1992—100 per cent. count of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.
February 1995 to May 1996—5 per cent. sample of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.
Figures from Department of Social Security.

	February 1994		May 1994		August 1994		November 1994		February 1995		May 1995	
	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment
Great Britain	2,727	317	2,551	281	2,542	266	2,341	240	2,376	239	2,222	231
South East	885	104	834	91	823	84	760	74	760	73	722	74
East Anglia	82	10	75	9	73	8	67	8	71	8	66	8
South West	212	28	192	24	188	22	178	21	181	21	164	19
West Midlands	267	31	248	28	250	27	224	24	223	24	209	22
East Midlands	176	22	165	21	165	19	150	17	160	18	148	16
Yorkshire and Humberside	241	27	228	24	228	24	212	22	220	22	206	21
North West	315	35	297	30	295	29	268	26	271	25	253	24
North	170	18	161	17	160	16	155	16	156	15	147	15
Wales	130	15	120	13	120	13	111	12	113	12	105	11
Scotland	247	26	232	23	240	24	215	22	222	22	201	21

Notes:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Quarterly data is not available prior to May 1992.

Source:

May 1990 to May 1991—5 per cent. sample of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.

November 1991 to November 1994—100 per cent. count of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.

February 1995 to May 1995—5 per cent. sample of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.

Figures from Department of Social Security.

	August 1995		November 1995		February 1996		May 1996	
	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment	Total Claimants	Neither UB nor IS in payment
Great Britain	2,263	242	2,117	216	2,226	229	2,072	206
South East	732	76	688	66	704	70	660	63
East Anglia	66	7	62	7	67	8	62	7
South West	164	19	158	18	167	19	150	16
West Midlands	215	24	196	21	205	22	193	20
East Midlands	149	18	138	15	150	17	138	14
Yorkshire and Humberside	211	22	198	20	211	22	194	19
North West	257	26	238	22	253	24	238	21
North	149	16	143	15	148	14	138	14
Wales	110	12	104	12	111	12	103	11
Scotland	211	22	193	21	208	22	197	20

Notes:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Quarterly data is not available prior to May 1992.

Source:

May 1990 to May 1991—5 per cent. sample of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.

November 1991 to November 1994—100 per cent. count of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.

February 1995 to May 1996—5 per cent. sample of Unemployed Claimants in Great Britain taken on the second Thursday of the months shown.

Figures from Department of Social Security.

Number of jobseekers signing on by post for unemployment related benefits (including credits) 1990–93. Great Britain

Region	1990 1st quarter	1990 2nd quarter	1990 3rd quarter	1990 4th quarter	1991 1st quarter	1991 2nd quarter	1991 3rd quarter	1991 4th quarter
Total number of claimants. Great Britain	81,983	74,071	87,149	95,232	120,594	131,018	138,986	146,362
East Midlands and Eastern	13,669	13,675	18,404	21,317	26,884	25,757	25,694	25,947
London and South East	8,780	7,491	10,843	14,473	22,194	31,342	33,201	33,518
Northern	2,693	2,349	3,048	3,090	3,939	4,291	4,570	4,816
North West	3,292	3,073	3,510	3,403	4,045	4,321	4,888	5,179
South West	10,415	8,960	10,173	12,071	15,534	16,825	18,062	19,906
West Midlands	3,255	2,979	3,451	3,585	4,458	5,180	5,937	6,706
Yorkshire and the Humber	6,568	6,080	7,435	7,803	9,585	10,396	11,332	12,697
Office for Scotland	25,289	22,530	22,628	21,438	24,626	23,344	24,985	26,728
Office for Wales	8,023	6,934	7,657	8,053	9,328	9,562	10,318	10,865

Source:

Resources Monitoring system database.

Region	1992 1st quarter	1992 2nd quarter	1992 3rd quarter	1992 4th quarter	1993 1st quarter	1993 2nd quarter	1993 3rd quarter	1993 4th quarter
Total number of claimants. Great Britain	169,912	172,123	185,028	198,048	218,769	207,159	203,662	195,468
East Midlands and Eastern	30,430	31,311	32,268	33,490	37,559	35,573	34,641	32,237
London and South East	39,728	43,885	49,738	56,056	62,464	60,625	62,181	58,619
Northern	5,359	5,153	5,091	5,554	6,151	5,565	5,558	5,455
North West	5,678	5,943	6,097	6,407	7,239	6,730	6,898	6,554
South West	22,920	23,917	25,664	27,628	30,211	27,647	26,482	25,434
West Midlands	7,054	7,157	7,692	7,753	8,584	10,077	7,688	7,320
Yorkshire and the Humber	15,971	15,646	16,916	17,359	19,127	17,960	17,532	16,909
Office for Scotland	30,744	28,415	29,678	31,313	34,206	30,874	30,686	31,001
Office for Wales	12,029	11,396	11,884	12,486	13,227	12,107	11,995	11,939

Source:
Resources Monitoring system database.

Number of jobseekers signing on by post for unemployment related benefits (including credits) 1994–1996. Great Britain.

Regions	1994 1st qtr	1994 2nd qtr	1994 3rd qtr	1994 4th qtr	1995 1st qtr	1995 2nd qtr	1995 3rd qtr	1995 4th qtr	1996 1st qtr	1996 2nd qtr	1996 3rd qtr	1996 4th qtr
Total number of claimants. Great Britain.	197,154	178,436	169,798	155,711	156,865	136,925	129,020	118,714	118,489	101,208	91,145	
East Midlands and Eastern.	33,179	30,441	28,038	23,908	23,663	21,094	17,353	12,285	9,882	8,230	6,313	
London and South East.	54,972	50,059	46,089	41,096	41,565	32,230	32,811	29,663	28,298	24,382	20,885	
Northern.	5,786	5,291	5,193	5,281	4,766	4,703	4,539	4,272	4,408	4,034	3,761	
North West.	6,760	6,057	6,078	5,763	5,901	5,085	4,804	4,215	4,427	3,787	3,279	
South West.	25,560	22,717	14,654	20,180	20,228	17,669	15,964	15,478	15,450	11,506	9,222	
West Midlands.	7,286	6,309	5,902	5,443	5,388	4,462	4,472	4,116	4,067	3,320	3,350	
Yorkshire and the Humber.	17,675	16,230	16,065	13,791	13,586	12,244	12,154	11,935	12,239	10,726	9,781	
Office for Scotland.	33,885	30,546	30,502	29,806	31,089	27,570	26,966	26,926	29,855	26,196	25,961	
Office for Wales.	12,051	10,787	11,120	10,443	10,678	9,869	9,957	9,825	9,855	9,026	8,591	

Source:
Resources Monitoring system database.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *719*, to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) what estimate she has made of the number of people who could gain from abolishing the 16 guided learning hours limit for those receiving the jobseeker's allowance across the range of the estimates of £500 million to £1,250 million. [15414]

Mr. Forth: We estimate that between about 200,000 and 400,000 additional people could receive jobseeker's allowance. This does take account of behavioural effects which might result from the change.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide a breakdown of the spending by his Department on external advice in relation to the Scott inquiry, indicating how much has been spent on legal advice and from whom it was obtained. [14531]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The amount spent by my Department on external advice in relation to giving evidence to the Scott inquiry and the preparation of the Government's response to it is £771,974. The whole of this amount was for legal advice and included £80,307 representing the value of legal services charged by the Treasury Solicitor's Department. It also includes £127,870 for the costs of legal advice for independent witnesses which were paid for by Sir Richard Scott's inquiry and therefore fell to this Department. External legal advice was obtained from Alistair Thompson and Partners, Barnett Alexander Chart, Beechcroft Stanleys, Blythe Liggins, Hamilton Burns and Moore, Harris Rosenblatt and Kramer, Herbert Smith, Irwin Mitchell, Mr. Gordon Jackson, Kingsley Napley, Mr. S. Richards and Russell Jones and Walker.

Mr. Cook: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any capacity relating to the Scott inquiry. [14530]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The direct salary cost of officials within DTI wholly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry since 1992 was approximately £324,000. Other officials were involved from time to time; their direct salary cost is unquantifiable. This figure does not include the salary cost of those involved in taking forward the Department's review of strategic export controls since the end of August.

The direct salary cost since 1992 of Sir Richard Scott's inquiry team, which also fell to my Department was approximately £852,000.

Privatisation Brochure

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what was the total cost of *(a)* the production and *(b)* the distribution of his departmental document "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free". [15569]

(2) how many copies of "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free"; have been printed. [15568]

Mr. Lang: My Department has printed 3,000 copies of the booklet "Privatisation: Setting Enterprise Free". These cost £2,900 to produce and £707 to distribute.

PRIME MINISTER

Children's Services Strategy Group

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *161*, how he will monitor the performance of the children's services strategy group; how long the group has been in existence; how often it meets and under whose chairmanship; and what guidelines have been issued to Government Departments on the status of the group's advice. [15710]

The Prime Minister: The children's services strategy group first met in September 1996. It is likely to meet four to five times a year and its next meeting is scheduled for March. The group is chaired by Department of Health officials who lead on policy for children's services. There are no plans to monitor the group formally, although Department of Health Ministers will be taking a close interest in its work. The group has not issued guidelines to other Government Departments. It is there not to issue formal advice but to co-ordinate and inform the development of policy relating to children in all areas represented by its membership.

WALES

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14798]

Mr. Hague: Postcode areas are used for a number of purposes:

—By the Further Education Funding Council in part of its methodology for funding further education institutions.

—To select houses to be monitored as part of a research to assess radon levels in houses in Wales.

—For the 1996 Welsh house condition survey, which is one of the components in the housing capital allocation formula—As the basic sampling frame for both the 1992 Welsh social security survey and the 1997 household interview survey.

—By the Welsh register of manufacturing employment to define different regions in Wales, for example by parliamentary constituencies, unitary authorities and travel-to-work areas.

—In origin and destination traffic surveys to build a model of traffic movement and demand form one area to another.

—Indirectly in a small part of the formula for calculating local authority spending assessments which are used for the distribution of revenue support grant.

—To help identify individual companies or sites when compiling the Welsh index of production and construction.

By health authorities and trusts to authenticate ECRS (extra-contractual referrals) to determine the purchaser responsible for funding treatment.

—To assist health authorities and trusts in the health needs assessment process at district and sub district levels, for contract monitoring; monitoring activity at local level; and assisting in determining GP allocations.

—Used to assist in the administration of deprivation payments made to GPs having patients living in wards which are identified as deprived for the purposes of these surveys.

—Used by highways directorate to analyse comments made on public consultation returns for new road schemes, in order to determine whether the respondent is local to the area.

The ways in which the postcode areas are used are reviewed from time to time.

Deeside

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funding he has allocated to improve the physical environment of Deeside, indicating the location of each project. [15143]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Details of Welsh Office funding allocated in 1996–97 and 1997–98 for schemes to improve the physical environment of Deeside, and comparable Welsh development agency schemes for 1996–97, are contained in the following table:

Welsh development agency expenditure on improving the environment (Flintshire) (100 per cent. Grant)

Urban	*1996–97* £
Buckley link road	490,000
Buckley precinct	165,000
Property acquisition and improvement to car park, Buckley	100,000
Town improvement grants on A548 corridor	50,000
Land Reclamation	
18 minor schemes have been supported throughout Flintshire in 1996–97 at a total cost of £347,000 including £70,000 at Neston tank cleaners	347,000
Environmental	
8 minor schemes have been supported throughout Flintshire in 1996–97 at a total cost of £181,000	181,000

	1996–97 £	*1997–98* £
Welsh Office Transport Grant (50 per cent. grant and 50 per cent. SCA)		
Third Dee Crossing	19,900,000	7,400,00
Welsh Office Strategic Development Scheme/Welsh Capital Challenge Funding (75 per cent. Welsh Office Grant 25 per cent. SCA)		
Traffic Management, Buckley Town Centre (100 per cent. SCA)	650,000	10,000
Construction of Industrial Road and Units at Sandycroft	400,000	100,000
Development of Shotton County Stores	400,000	
Provision of Infrastructure at River Lane/Flint Road Industrial Park, Saltney (100 per cent. SCA)	350,000	1,000,000

	1996–97 £	1997–98 £
Refurbishment of Derelict Textile Mill at Holywell into 'FOYER' Complex	150,000	200,000
Construction of Units at Expressway, Queensferry—Phase 2	295,000	
Unitary Authority Block Allocation (Capital)	251,000	287,500
Industrial Development, Sandycroft		100,000
Traffic Analysis of Dee Crossing		50,000
Chester Street/Church Street Improvements, Flint		60,000
Flint Station Area Improvements		100,000
Market Square Improvements, Flint		100,000
Pedestrian Route Improvements, Flint		30,000
A548 Town Centre Corridor Improvements, Flint		40,000
Welsh Office Popular Schools Initiative (100 per cent. SCA)		
Ewloe Green Primary School Extension to Classrooms, Nursery and Parking Area	150,000	5,000
Mountain Lane Primary School, Improvement to Classrooms, Practical and Play Areas	37,000	112,000
Alun High School, Provision of 4 New and Conversion of 3 Old Science Laboratories; Associated Ancillary Facilities; Library; 6th Form Teaching Area	963,000	

Power Stations

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will issue planning guidance to future applicants to build power stations to take account of *(a)* vapour clouds and *(b)* dust particles. [15147]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government's planning policies are set out in Wales, in "Planning Guidance (Wales) Planning Policy" and in a series of technical advice notes currently in preparation.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the control of emissions from power stations is the responsibility of the Environment Agency. The system of integrated pollution control introduced by the Act requires prior authorisation by the agency. Authorisation will not be granted unless the agency is satisfied that the process in question will not have a harmful effect on the environment. The authorisation process is backed up by a system of regular monitoring.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many councils have spent above the capping limit; and if he will make a statement. [15142]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Legally no local authority can set a budget above its cap. However, an authority can set a budget above the level of its provisional cap. Only one authority has done this. Aberconwy borough council set a budget for 1993–94 above its provisional cap, but because of the exceptional expenditure arising from the flooding in Llandudno in June 1993, it was designated at the level of the budget it had set. An authority's budget for capping purposes excludes some types of spending.

Influenza, Pneumonia and Bronchitis

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many deaths from *(a)* influenza, *(b)* pneumonia and *(c)* bronchitis occurred during January 1997; and what were the equivalent figures for January (i) 1994, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 1996. [15214]

Mr. Hague: Figures from the Office for National Statistics of the number of deaths among residents of Wales where the underlying cause was influenza, pneumonia or bronchitis are shown in the following table:

Deaths occurring in January of each year

ICD 9		1997[1]	1996[1]	1995	1994
487	Influenza	23	5	2	2
480–486	Pneumonia	747	459	397	338
466, 491	Bronchitis	40	38	38	33

[1] Provisional. Figures for 1997 are the latest available. They will be incomplete due to some January deaths waiting to be registered and added to the ONS database.

Child Care

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the *(a)* availability and *(b)* distribution of child care facilities in Wales. [15065]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Summaries of the data for Wales and for old county councils on facilities for full day care, including childminding, and for sessional day care are published in the latest in the series of Welsh Office statistical publication, "Activities of Social Services Departments", for the year ended 31 March 1994.

Information on child care facilities in Wales is contained in the Chwarae Teg 1996 audit of child care.

The child care database, compiled by Chwarae Teg and the Wales information network, provide comprehensive information on availability and distribution of childcare

facilities in Wales. It can be accessed at a number of sources, including Chwarae Teg, public libraries and jobcentres.

Wales Youth Agency

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what decisions he has reached following the financial management and policy review of the Wales Youth Agency. [16399]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: As recommended by the review, we have taken the decision to change the status of the Wales Youth Agency from an executive non-departmental public body to a grant-aided organisation.

The agency will continue to be funded by the Welsh Office for its important work in helping to raise and maintain standards in youth work in Wales. From 1 April 1997 this will include the disbursement of grant to national voluntary youth organisations, amounting to £361,000 in 1997–98.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sport

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the new measures in sport which *(a)* her Department, *(b)* her Department in conjunction with other Government Departments, *(c)* sports councils and *(d)* other relevant bodies have instigated since the last general election. [6894]

Mr. Sproat: Since the last general election, the Government have developed a radical strategy of profound changes in policy for the way in which the Government, and Government-sponsored agencies, deal with sport in this country. It is not too much to say that these new policies amount to a revolution in sport.

The main elements of this radical strategy stretch across a very wide range of sporting areas: from putting sport back at the heart of weekly school life—with a particular, but not exclusive, emphasis on traditional, competitive, team games—through constructing much closer links between local schools and local sports clubs, to setting up, for elite athletes, a British academy of sport, a network of regional institutes of sport, academies of individual sports, and a multi-million pound sports scholarship scheme for thousands of individual elite athletes.

In support of this radical strategy, the Government have first, completely reorganised the sports council structure, abolishing the old Great Britain Sports Council, and the old regional councils for sports and recreation, and setting up an English Sports Council and a United Kingdom Sport Council, in addition to the existing Sports Councils for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Secondly, the Government set up the sports councils as distributors of lottery funds to inject an unprecedented amount of money into sport in this country. Since the lottery was introduced two years ago, the sports councils have awarded over £439 million to over 2,568 sports projects, involving 59 different sports.

The main details of this radical new strategy for sport are set out in a 103-point paper, which I have today placed in the Libraries of the House. These measures cover the whole range of the sporting spectrum, and fall into 11 main categories:

(i) sport in schools;
(ii) sport in further and higher education;
(iii) the role of governing bodies;
(iv) the role of local authorities;
(v) the role of local sports clubs;
(vi) restructuring of the Sports Council;
(vii) sport and safety;
(viii) the National Lottery;
(ix) other funding;
(x) support for elite athletes; and
(xi) UK sport in the wider world.

TRANSPORT

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport under what statutory authority powers the two United Kingdom assessors into the loss of the MV Derbyshire were appointed; and by whom. [15566]

Mr. Bowis: No statutory powers were required for the appointment of the technical assessors.

Public Transport Fare Increases

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the annual percentage change and *(b)* the increase in fares on (i) London Buses, (ii) London Underground, (iii) all London Transport, (iv) Network SouthEast and (v) British Rail in each year since 1984–85, taking 1984–85 as the base, showing the increase in both actual and real terms; and what was the annual rate of inflation for each of those years. [15940]

Mr. Bowis: Available information is shown in the tables.

	London Buses		*London Underground*		*All London Transport*		*Network SouthEast*		*British Rail*		*RPI*
	Actual	*Real*	*Actual*	*Real*	*Actual*	*Real*	*Actual*	*Real*	*Actual*	*Real*	
1985–86	8.6	2.5	7.2	1.3	7.7	1.7	7.2	1.7	6.9	0.9	5.9
1986–87	5.9	2.6	5.7	2.5	5.6	2.3	7.0	3.7	7.5	4.2	3.2
1987–88	4.9	0.0	6.4	2.3	5.8	1.7	5.2	1.2	5.4	1.3	4.0
1988–89	10.8	4.6	10.3	4.1	10.3	4.0	7.0	0.9	7.1	1.1	6.0
1989–90	10.3	2.3	11.1	3.0	10.8	2.8	8.5	0.6	8.0	0.2	7.8
1990–91	10.3	0.5	11.2	1.4	10.8	1.0	10.1	0.4	10.2	0.5	9.7
1991–92	9.6	4.6	9.9	4.9	9.7	4.7	9.5	4.5	9.2	4.3	4.7
1992–93	7.9	4.6	7.8	4.5	7.8	4.5	7.7	4.4	6.9	3.7	3.2
1993–94	8.0	6.2	7.6	5.8	7.8	6.0	7.7	5.9	5.9	4.1	1.7
1994–95	5.8	3.0	5.8	3.0	5.8	3.0	5.4	2.6	3.7	1.0	2.7

	London Buses		London Underground		All London Transport		Network SouthEast		British Rail		RPI
	Actual	Real	Actual	Real	Actual	Real	Actual	Real	Actual	Real	
1995–96	5.1	1.8	4.9	1.6	4.9	1.6	n/a	n/a	3.0	–0.3	3.3
1996–97	4.3	n/a	4.4	n/a	4.4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

1. Fares data for Network South East are no longer available.
2. BR data supplied by British Rail.
3. All other data are supplied by London Transport.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the annual percentage change and *(b)* the increase in child fares on London Transport in each year since 1984–85, taking 1984–85 as the base, showing the increase in both actual and real terms. [15941]

Mr. Bowis: Available data from London Transport are as follows:

Percentage changes in London Transport child fares[1]: 1985–86 to 1995–96

	Actual	Real
1985–86	5.0	–0.8
1986–87	0.8	–2.4
1987–88	8.0	3.8
1988–89	19.5	12.8
1989–90	18.7	10.1
1990–91	9.2	–0.4
1991–92	16.4	11.1
1992–93	9.8	6.5
1993–94	3.8	2.1
1994–95	2.3	–0.4
1995–96	0.1	–3.1

[1] Ordinary tickets only. Information on travelcards and season tickets is not available.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Krishna Maharaj

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions when British representatives have met Mr. Krishna Maharaj. [15679]

Dr. Liam Fox: Consular officers visited Mr. Maharaj on:

3 January 1989
22 August 1989
12 February 1991
19 December 1991
11 June 1992
9 December 1992
22 November 1993
27 March 1995 and
4 April 1996.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the law office of the capital collateral representative has indicated it has the resources to pay for the legal preparation of Mr. Krishna Maharaj's application for a retrial in Florida. [15675]

Dr. Fox: The Florida state capital collateral representative is not responsible for the preparation of Mr. Maharaj's application for a retrial. If his current legal representative withdraws from the case the public defender's office will appoint the capital collateral representative to represent him. The question of resources is for the Florida state authorities.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the financial resources needed by Mr. Krishna Maharaj to put his case for a retrial. [15676]

Dr. Fox: That is a matter for Mr. Maharaj and his lawyers.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department's Ministers have met the family or legal representatives of Mr. Krishna Maharaj. [15678]

Dr. Fox: No.

Capital Collateral Representative (Florida)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the payments made by the capital collateral representative to condemned convicts normally meet the costs of their legal representation in cases where a retrial is sought. [15677]

Dr. Liam Fox: The capital collateral representative is appointed to represent prisoners sentenced to death in Florida who have no funds to retain counsel in post-conviction proceedings. The CCR does not make payments to condemned convicts.

Shanti Nagar, Pakistan

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the high commissioner for Pakistan about the destruction of homes and churches in the village of Shanti Nagar, near Khanewal on 6 February; and if he will make a statement. [15602]

Dr. Liam Fox: We are deeply concerned about the attacks on Christians and churches in Khanewal. We have not made representations to the Pakistan high commissioner, since I intend to discuss the matter when I visit Pakistan later this month. In the meantime, I understand that the governor of Punjab has promised compensation to those affected and has ordered an enquiry. I expressed general concern about the treatment of religious minorities to the Minister of Human Rights when I called on him in October.

Russia (Independence movements)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the independence movements in *(a)* Chechnya, *(b)* Abkhazia, *(c)* Nagorno-Kharabakh and Trans-dnestr; and if he will make a statement. [15603]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We subscribe fully to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe principle that frontiers are inviolable and can only be changed peacefully and by agreement. Any change in the status of the four regions mentioned would have to be mutually agreed with the authorities of the countries concerned. We do not believe that the right to self-determination equates automatically to a right to secession.

Arms Sales

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the countries and other bodies which have bought arms from the United Kingdom in the last 10 years under the export credits guarantee scheme and defaulted on their payments and *(b)* the sums of money involved in each case. [14007]

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

I am not currently able to provide the requested information. A review of what information can be made available is taking place and a fuller reply will be given in due course.

School Links

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department provides to schools wishing to develop links with schools in other countries *(a)* within and *(b)* outside the British Commonwealth, and if he will make a statement. [15275]

Mr. Paice: I am replying, since the Department for Education and Employment has responsibility for international school links.

The Department contributes to the funding of a number of organisations responsible for implementing the Government's education interchange programmes so far as schools are concerned. These include the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges, which is primarily concerned with developing school links with Europe and the United States, and the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers. Grant in aid figures (England and Wales) for 1996–97 are: CBEVE—£3.9 million; LECT—£0.5 million. Under its development programme, the Overseas Development Administration also gave a grant of £50,000 in 1996–97 to Education Partners Overseas, which is an organisation set up to organise and supervise twinning between British schools and schools in developing countries. No distinction is made by the EPO between Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries.

DEFENCE

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* radioactive ship and submarine hulks remain at Rosyth and Devonport and *(b)* spent reactors remain at each site; and what is the amount of medium and high level radioactive waste at each. [16000]

Mr. Arbuthnot: There are three decommissioned nuclear submarines at Devonport and five at Rosyth, containing only intermediate and low-level waste. A further two nuclear submarines at Rosyth and one submarine at Devonport are to undergo defuelling, de-equipping, and lay-up preparations prior to long-term storage pending disposal. Immediately after, there are 75 tonnes of intermediate-level waste and 140 tonnes of low-level waste within each submarine, which will decay in time. The actual level of radioactivity for each submarine, bearing in mind the differing operating profiles, lifetimes and decommissioning dates, can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

There is currently one spent reactor core at each of the dockyards pending removal to the storage facility at British Nuclear Fuels, Sellafield. I am withholding information relating to the radioactivity levels within the spent reactor cores under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to Government information relating to national security and defence. Storage of used submarine fuel at both dockyards fully meets the site licence requirements as authorised by the Health and Safety Executive nuclear installation inspectorate.

Tomahawk-fitted Submarines

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Tomahawk-fitted submarines to enter operational service. [15705]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Tomahawk is expected to enter service in Royal Navy submarines in late 1998.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are claiming family credit in the Scunthorpe travel-to-work area. [15499]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Peter Mathison, chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 13 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people are claiming Family Credit (FC) within the Scunthorpe travel to work area.

The information is not available in the format requested. It may be helpful if I explain that FC is administered centrally by the Family Credit Unit. Statistics are produced on a national basis and provide the number of families in receipt of FC within a particular Benefits Agency (BA) office area at a given date. However, this only serves as a "snap-shot" of the position at that given date and does not provide details of the number of families in receipt of FC annually.

At 3 January 1997, there were 2,029 families in receipt of FC within the Scunthorpe BA office area. This has been extracted from a total of 687,917 recipients nationally. It should be noted that these figures are provisional and subject to change.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining if the disability test used at renewal stage were added to the list of qualifying benefits for new claims for disability working allowance. [15415]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on 30 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *476*.

Social Security Spending

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current percentage of public spending taken up by social security; what was the equivalent figure in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* 1992; and what has been the percentage increase since 1979. [15426]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is set out in the table:

Grand total of social security expenditure expressed as a percentage of General Government Expenditure (X) (GGE (X))

1979–80: 23 per cent.

1987–88: 28 per cent.

1992–93: 30 per cent.

1996–97: 31 per cent.

This is a percentage increase of 35 per cent. between 1979–80 and 1996–97.

Sources:

1. March 1996 social security departmental report and earlier equivalents.

2. Financial statement and budget report 1996–97. The figures for the relevant years are shown in Table 6a: Point 1.

Notes:

1. Outturn figures are used for the period 1979–80, 1987–88 and 1992–93. The figure for 1996–97 is estimated outturn.

2. Grand total of social security spending; this includes both expenditure on benefits and their administration as well as additional local authority spending on housing and council tax/community charge benefit.

3. General Government Expenditure (X)* (GGE(X)); this excludes privatisation proceeds, expenditure out of the proceeds of the national lottery, and receipt of interest and dividends from public corporations and the private sector.

Income Support

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining and *(b)* the cost of extending payments of income support for four weeks to people who (i) are unemployed, (ii) have been unemployed for two years or more and (iii) are claimants in receipt of a disability premium. [15427]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Estimate of the number gaining and cost of extending payment of jobseeker's allowance (income based) for four weeks to the unemployed who come off the benefit because they have found work by duration of unemployment in 1997–98

	All unemployed	*Unemployed for two years or more*
Numbers gaining	1,580,000	30,000
Cost	£340 million	£10 million

1. Costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million, the number of gainers is rounded to the nearest 10,000.
2. Figures are based on estimates of the number of unemployed leaving jobseeker's allowance (income based) for work in a full year consistent with Her Majesty's Treasury unemployment assumption of 1.8 million in 1997–98.
3. Behavioural changes have not been taken into account.
4. 100 per cent. take up is assumed.
5. No in-work benefits are taken into account.
6. Income support for the unemployed was replaced by jobseeker's allowance on 7 October 1996.
7. It is assumed that benefit is extended only to those who begin work. There is not sufficient data to allow a robust estimate of the cost and numbers of people gaining from extending income support for four weeks to those in receipt of the disability premium who begin work.

Family Credit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *566*, how many of the gainers from a reduction in the family credit taper to *(a)* 60 per cent. and *(b)* 50 per cent. would be (i) employed lone parents, (ii) employed couples, (iii) self-employed lone parents and (iv) self-employed couples. [15428]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated numbers gaining from reducing the family credit taper 1997–98

Family type	*60 per cent. taper*	*50 per cent. taper*
Couples		
Employed	305,000	445,000
Self-employed	55,000	75,000
Lone parents		
Employed	210,000	240,000
Self-employed	15,000	15,000
Total	585,000	770,000

1. Estimates are based on the 1994–95 Family Resources Survey uprated to 1997–98 prices and benefit levels.
2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000 and may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Claimants (Exempt Work)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people on *(a)* incapacity benefit and *(b)* severe disablement allowance have applied to undertake exempt work since April 1995; how many have subsequently undertaken work; and how many have been refused by reason for refusal. [15429]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Earnings Disregard

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of raising the earnings disregard to £25 for each individual adult in a benefit unit claiming *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* council tax benefit, for 1997–98 and 1998–99; and what is his estimate of (i) the cost and (ii) the numbers gaining for each benefit. [15430]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is set out in the table.

Benefit	*Cost/savings (£ million)*		*Gainers/losers*	
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Income support	–60	–60	+135,000	+135,000
Housing benefit	–115	–115	+205,000	+205,000
Council tax benefit	–45	–45	+260,000	+255,000

Benefit	Cost/savings (£ million)		Gainers/losers	
	1997–98	1998–99	1997–98	1998–99
Family credit	+25	+30	–5,000	–10,000
Total	–195	–190	—	—

Source:
May 1995 Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and 1994–95 Family Resources survey.
Notes:

1. Costs are rounded to the nearest £5 million and gainers/losers to the nearest 5,000.

2. A negative figure denotes costs or gainers, and a positive figure indicates savings or losers.

3. All disregards were increased simultaneously. Increased Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit costs arising from new entitlement to Income Support are included in the Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit costs and gainers respectively.

4. Benefit units entitled to either Family Credit or Income Support are assumed to claim the benefit which gives them a higher net income. Hence some families leave Family Credit to claim Income Support.

5. This is a deadweight estimate. There is insufficient information on which to estimate a behavioural response.

6. Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance cases are excluded from the estimate of Income Support.

War Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by *(a)* region, *(b)* parliamentary constituency and *(c)* type of impairment the number of war pensioners making claims for benefit. [15504]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is as follows:

Two thousand one hundred and fifty-one new claims for war pensions were received in January 1997, the latest month for which figures are available, and 3,725 claims from existing war pensioners were received for further disablements.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his current estimate of the savings which will result from changes to the administration of claims to the War Pensions Agency. [15505]

Mr. Heald: The information is as follows:

Estimated reduction in forecast programme expenditure (rounded to the nearest £5 million)

1997–98: £5 million

1998–99: £10 million

1999–2000: £15 million

Estimated reduction in forecast expenditure on administration (rounded to the nearest £0.1 million)

1997–98: £0.7 million

1998–99: £1.0 million

1999–2000: £1.0 million

The changes affect future entitlement only.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's correspondence with Mark Lutman and Adrian Davis regarding their evidence on the subject of noise-induced hearing loss; and if he will publish the correspondence. [15506]

Mr. Heald: My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord MacKay of Ardbrecknish, the Minister of State for Social Security, received an open letter signed by four leading experts in hearing loss including professors Lutman and Davis. A copy of this letter has been placed in the Library. The letter confirms that noise-induced hearing loss and hearing loss due to aging are broadly additive. It is that medical opinion which is now being applied in the assessment of claims for war disablement pension.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of raising the earnings limit for invalid care allowance to £61 in order to be credited for class 1 national insurance contributions. [15585]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The cost of changing the earnings limit for invalid care allowance to a gross earnings limit equal to the current lower earnings limit for class 1 national insurance contributions is estimated to be £5 million.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on sample data and should be treated with caution.

2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1994–95.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to credit state earnings-related pension scheme contributions to carers receiving invalid care allowance. [15586]

Mr. Heald: The White Paper "Equality in State Pension Age" stated that the regulations to extend home responsibilities protection to SERPS would be made at the appropriate time.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will estimate the cost of enabling carers over retirement age to receive invalid care allowance; [15587]

(2) if he will estimate the cost of allowing new claims for carers premium to be made for those over retirement age. [15588]

Mr. Mitchell: The estimated cost of allowing new claims for invalid care allowance from those aged over 65 is £20 million for 1996–97, of which £10 million would be accounted for by increased receipt of the carer premium.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on sample data and should be treated with caution.

2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1994–95.

Benefit Collection System

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social

Security if he will estimate the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* number of pensioners who currently have their state pension and other benefits collected by (i) an agent and (ii) an appointee. [15623]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available in relation to retirement pension, attendance allowance and income support for pensioners is set out in the table:

	Numbers of appointees	*As proportion of beneficiaries of pension age*	*Numbers of agents*	*As proportion of beneficiaries of pension age*
Retirement pension[1]	214,482	[2]2.1 per cent.	not known	not known
Income support to pensioners	[4]147,000	9.4 per cent.	[4]71,000	4.5 per cent.
Attendance allowance	49,687	[3]4.2 per cent.	122,145	[3]10.3 per cent.

Sources:
Generalised matching service (datasearch team)—September 1996.
DSS analytical services.
Income support quarterly statistical enquiry—February 1996.
Notes:
[1] Paid alone or in combination with other benefits.
[2] Numbers of retirement pension beneficiaries obtained in March 1996.
[3] Numbers of attendance allowance beneficiaries obtained in November 1996.
[4] Income support figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the operation of the agency and appointee system for the collection of the state pension and other benefits. [15624]

Mr. Mitchell: The Department keeps these matters under on-going review. In particular, we are examining the current arrangements for appointees and agents in the context of the transition to payment by benefit cards.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report,* columns *153–54,* what estimates he has made of gross pensioner income in 1996 prices in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 2010 and *(c)* 2025; (i) by quintile and (ii) decile, indicating in each case the composition of income by source. [13233]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* Information is not available in the format requested. The pensioners' incomes series 1994–95 has been used to provide estimates of gross income, and its components, by quintile of the single and couple pensioner populations in 1994–95, at July 1994 prices. Estimates are given in tables 1 and 2.

The pensioners' incomes series 1994–95 is largely based on data drawn from the 1994–95 family expenditure survey, which does not contain information concerning the work histories of individuals, and is therefore not a good base upon which to forecast future levels of pensioners' incomes. Estimates of gross income, and its components, by quintile of the single and couple pensioner populations in 2010 and 2025 at 1994 prices have been made using PENSIM, a dynamic simulation model that projects pensioners' incomes into the next century, and are shown in tables 5 to 8.

However, for a number of reasons, the pensioners incomes series 1994–95 and PENSIM estimates are not directly comparable—they are necessarily based on different data sources, and have been calculated using methodologies that differ in a number of respects. While the pensioners' incomes series provides a good guide to historic absolute levels of pensioners' incomes, and their components, PENSIM has been designed to forecast long-term trends in pensioners' incomes, rather than precise amounts. In order to highlight these trends over time, tables 2 and 3 show PENSIM estimates of gross income, and its components, by quintile of the single and couple pensioner populations in 1994, at 1994 prices.

Tables 5 to 8 also show estimates of net income, and the percentage growth—to the nearest 5 per cent.—in net income from 1994. This information effectively supersedes that information given in my written answer to the hon. Member on Monday 13 January, *Official Report,* columns *153–54,* which contained some figures which were calculated for 2020, but were described as estimates for 2010.

PENSIM estimates are based on a number of economic and behavioural assumptions. Due to the reliance on assumptions and the time period covered, estimates should be treated with caution, and have been rounded to the nearest £1. Reliable estimates of gross income by decile are not available from PENSIM or the pensioners' income series 1994–95, due to the size of the data samples used. The Department is aware of the limitations of the current PENSIM model. Most of these are due to the age and internal consistency of the relatively small data set used, which is based on three different surveys. It is intended to use larger data sets, including the lifetime labour market data base, to improve the robustness and modelling capability of PENSIM in the future.

Table 1: Mean gross income and its components by quintile, single pensioners 1994–95 (July 1994 Prices)—The pensioners' incomes series 1994–95

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q5*	*Mean*
Benefit income	65.40	75.50	87.60	93.60	89.80	82.40
Occupational pensions	3.00	8.10	12.00	25.50	94.50	28.60
Investment income	4.00	5.10	5.50	11.20	84.10	21.90
Earnings	0.20	0.50	0.50	2.30	41.20	8.90
Other income	0.30	0.40	0.60	1.10	2.10	0.90
Gross income	72.90	89.70	106.20	133.80	311.60	142.70

Table 2: Mean gross income and its components by quintile, pensioner couples 1994–95 (July 1994 Prices)—The pensioners' incomes series 1994–95

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Mean
Benefit income	108.80	120.00	126.90	125.00	116.00	119.30
Occupational pensions	8.00	22.60	44.60	89.20	219.00	76.70
Investment income	5.10	9.60	15.00	31.30	128.80	37.90
Earnings	0.60	4.70	5.50	13.20	77.80	20.30
Other income	0.80	0.30	3.10	1.00	3.00	1.60
Gross income	123.30	157.20	195.10	259.70	544.60	255.90

Notes:
1. All figures rounded to the nearest £0.10. Components may not sum to totals due to rounding.
2. Income refers to gross income before housing costs (BHC).
3. The quintiles have been constructed based on the equivalised BHC net income distribution. This is consistent with table 5 of the PI Series.
4. Pensioner units are defined as single people aged at state pension age or above, or couples in which the man is aged at state pension age or above.

Table 3: Mean gross income and its components by quintile, single pensioners 1994—PENSIM Estimates (1994 Prices)

	Q1 £	Q2 £	Q3 £	Q4 £	Q5 £	Mean £
Benefit income	51	65	73	82	70	68
Occupational pensions	1	4	9	16	61	18
Investment income	4	3	5	7	57	15
Earnings	*	*	*	*	11	2
Other income	*	*	*	*	3	1
Gross income	57	72	87	105	201	104
Net income	57	72	86	102	171	98

Table 4: Mean gross income and its components by quintile, pensioner couples 1994—PENSIM estimates (1994 prices)

	Q1 £	Q2 £	Q3 £	Q4 £	Q5 £	Mean £
Benefit income	103	116	117	120	117	114
Occupational pensions	6	16	35	57	92	41
Investment income	6	6	20	47	136	44
Earnings	*	*	2	8	84	19
Other income	*	*	*	1	5	1
Gross income	115	142	175	232	434	220
Net income	115	142	173	222	369	204

Table 5: Mean gross income and its components by quintile, single pensioners 2010—PENSIM estimates (1994 prices)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Mean
Benefit income	£48	£69	£78	£88	£89	£74
Occupational pensions	£2	£5	£11	£24	£62	£21
Investment income	£5	£5	£8	£18	£100	£27
Earnings	*	*	*	*	£20	£4
Other income	*	*	*	*	£1	*
Gross income	£55	£79	£96	£129	£271	£126
Net income	£55	£78	£94	£118	£221	£113
Percentage growth in net income from 1994	–5	10	10	15	30	15

Table 6: Mean gross income and its components by quintile, pensioner couples 2010—PENSIM estimates (1994 prices)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Mean
Benefit income	£106	£124	£136	£144	£147	£132
Occupational pensions	£6	£17	£35	£71	£109	£48
Investment income	£6	£11	£22	£38	£172	£50
Earnings	*	*	*	£7	£100	£22
Other income	*	*	*	*	£2	*
Gross income	£118	£153	£193	£261	£530	£251
Net income	£118	£153	£190	£245	£434	£228
Percentage growth in net income from 1994	5	5	10	10	20	10

Table 7: Mean gross income and its components by quintile, single pensioners 2025–PENSIM estimates (1994 prices)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Mean
Benefit income	£56	£82	£93	£100	£93	£85
Occupational pensions	£3	£6	£15	£37	£104	£33
Investment income	£5	£6	£15	£38	£216	£56
Earnings	*	*	*	*	£32	£7
Other income	*	*	*	*	*	*
Gross income	£64	£95	£123	£175	£446	£181
Net income	£64	£94	£115	£153	£342	£154
Percentage growth in net income from 1994	15	30	35	50	100	55

Table 8: Mean gross income and its components by quintile, pensioner couples 2025—PENSIM estimates (1994 prices)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Mean
Benefit income	£124	£147	£157	£150	£148	£145
Occupational pensions	£11	£30	£64	£110	£136	£70
Investment income	£10	£27	£48	£103	£338	£105
Earnings	*	*	£3	£23	£149	£35
Other income	*	*	*	*	*	*
Gross income	£146	£205	£272	£385	£771	£356
Net income	£146	£201	£256	£337	£602	£309
Percentage growth in net income from 1994	25	40	50	50	65	50

1. All figures rounded to the nearest £/5 per cent. * represents a value of less than £0.50.
2. Income refers to income before housing costs.
3. Benefit income includes basic state pension, SERPS, graduated pension, income support and housing benefit.
4. Pensioners are defined as those single aged at state pension age or above, or couples in which the husband is aged at state pension age or above.
5. Quintiles for single pensioners and pensioner couples have been calculated separately—i.e. the bottom quintile of single pensioners represents those pensioners in the bottom 20 per cent. of the income distribution of single pensioners.

TREASURY

Taxation (Personal Allowances)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining and *(b)* the cost of extending to married women the additional personal allowance currently payable to a married man whose wife is incapacitated. [15416]

Mr. Jack: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the tax yield from claimants of incapacity benefit; and how many claimants had tax deducted from their benefit by the Benefits Agency, during (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–97 to date. [15417]

Mr. Jack: The estimated tax yield from taxable incapacity benefit for 1996–97 is about £60 million.

The number of claimants who had no other source of income from which the tax could be collected and who have had the tax deducted from their benefit by the Benefits Agency in 1995–96 is about 25,000. A reliable estimate for 1996–97 to date is not available.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Olner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of making invalid care allowance tax free when the recipient is also in receipt of a non-state pension. [15589]

Mr. Jack: The estimated cost for 1997–98 of exempting invalid care allowance from tax for all claimants is about £20 million. A reliable estimate of the cost for claimants who are in receipt of a non-state pension is not available.

Customs Information System

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government have designated a competent customs administration to have national responsibility in the United Kingdom for the customs information system convention agreed at the Cannes European Council in June 1995. [16264]

Mr. Oppenheim: I can advise that HM Customs and Excise is designated as the customs administration with national responsibility for the customs information system in the United Kingdom.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost of salaries since 1992 paid to persons in his Department employed on a part-time or full-time basis in any capacity relating to the Scott inquiry. [14538]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The direct and quantifiable salary cost of officials in my departments wholly or partly employed on matters relating to the Scott inquiry since 1992 is approximately £510,970. This figure is the identifiable salary cost of officials for their work on the Scott inquiry, although, with one or two exceptions, none of these officials was engaged exclusively on the inquiry. In addition, other officials were inevitably involved from time to time, but the direct cost of their involvement is unquantifiable.

SCOTLAND

Hospital and Nursing Home Beds

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year since 1979 the numbers of *(a)* registered beds and *(b)* occupied beds in (i) registered private hospitals/clinics, (ii) registered private nursing homes and (iii) all registered establishments in Scotland, showing separately those which were for (1) acute specialties, (2) mental illness, (3) people with learning difficulties, (4) people with physical disabilities, (5) maternity and (6) other purposes. [15455]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information in the level of detail requested is not collected centrally. Table A shows available information on the number of homes and hospitals registered under the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938, as amended, or the Mental Health Acts 1960 to 1984, the total number of beds, and the category of services provided for each year since 1987. Table B provides details of the number of patients resident in these establishments by category as at 31 March in each year since 1994.

Registered Nursing Homes and Hospitals[3]—Number Registered, Bed Complement and Category of Service Provided as at 31 March

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995[1]	1996[1]
All Nursing Homes and Hospitals[4]										
Total number registered	164	215	270	316	354	388	437	437	458	499
Total number of beds	5,063	6,859	8,798	10,311	12,274	14,556	17,012	17,646	19,236	21,836
Number of homes or hospitals by services provided[5]										
Acute—medical[2]	51	27	22	22	26	16	22	19	7	10
Acute—surgical[2]	10	8	10	9	8	8	10	7	5	11
Mental illness (other than elderly)	6	8	8	18	11	15	17	24	26	28
Learning difficulties (other than elderly)	11	15	18	15	15	21	24	26	29	30
Physical handicap (other than elderly)	36	51	60	76	68	73	76	77	93	81
Maternity	2	1	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Abortions	6	6	6	6	6	7	8	3	4	7
Elderly long stay	143	192	244	287	320	359	388	383	403	444
Elderly with mental impairment or learning difficulties	78	95	139	172	195	197	231	220	230	223
Convalescence	53	83	107	127	131	133	137	128	104	89
Terminal care/hospice	32	60	90	111	120	137	143	121	84	68
Other	11	27	27	45	67	67	67	88	97	125

[1] Provisional.
[2] The figures on the number of establishments providing an Acute Surgical or Acute Medical services are believed to be under reported in 1994 and 1995.
[3] Private nursing homes and hospitals subject to the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1938 (as amended), or the Mental Health Act 1960–1984.
[4] It is not strictly possible to distinguish hospitals from nursing homes from the information available.
[5] Because a nursing home/hospital may provide more than one service, the total number of the services provided will exceed the total number of registrations.
Information prior to 1987 is not available.

Residents in registered nursing homes and private hospitals in Scotland[2]

	As at 31 March		
	1994	1995[1]	1996[1]
Elderly long stay	11,723	11,407	12,411
Elderly with mental impairment or learning difficulties	2,615	3,400	3,319
Learning difficulties (other than elderly)	314	279	331
Mental illness (other than elderly)	121	80	139
Physical handicap (other than elderly)	231	263	280
Acute—medical	32	14	10
Acute—surgical	76	35	59
Convalescence	72	80	32
Terminal care	201	176	157
Other	291	310	407
All residents	15,676	16,044	17,145

[1] Provisional.
[2] Private nursing homes and hospitals subject to the Nursing Homes Registration (Scotland) Act 1939 (as amended), or the Mental Health Act 1960–84.
Information prior to 1994 is not available.

Scottish Natural Heritage

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the principal terms of all the agreements entered into by Scottish Natural Heritage which contain provision for profits forgone; [15665]

(2) if he will list the principal terms of each management agreement entered into by Scottish Natural Heritage in which sums greater than £100,000 are to be paid to a landowner or land user. [15666]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* Details of all management agreements entered into by Scottish Natural Heritage appear in its annual reports, copies of which are laid before Parliament.

HEALTH

NHS Pay

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list salaries and wages costs for *(a)* general

and senior managers, *(b)* nurses and midwives and *(c)* administrative and clerical staff by NHS region for the financial years (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96. [14576]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is given in the tables. The figures for 1995–96 are provisional.

Hospital and community health services expenditure on salaries and wages 1994–95

£ thousand

	Executive board members, general and senior managers	*Nursing and midwifery*	*Administrative and clerical*
Northern and Yorkshire region	100,963	856,849	199,376
Trent region	59,387	598,343	139,380
Anglian and Oxford region	70,363	586,048	148,005
North Thames region	122,388	974,093	285,923
South Thames region	112,835	843,465	243,981
South and West region	84,420	808,721	183,149
West Midlands region	70,588	624,969	166,298
North-west region	93,474	885,274	212,515
Special health authorities	1,633	6,268	3,650
Total England	716,051	6,184,030	1,582,268

Source:

1. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.
2. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

Notes:

1. The figures are based upon gross costs including employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions.
2. The figures given are for hospital and community health services only. Family health services authorities and other health bodies are excluded as comparable figures are not collected centrally.

Hospital and community health services expenditure on salaries and wages 1995–96

£ thousand

	Executive board members, general and senior managers	*Nursing and midwifery*	*Administrative and clerical*
Northern and Yorkshire region	106,748	858,526	207,741
Trent region	73,403	593,534	147,138
Anglian and Oxford region	77,800	584,241	148,637
North Thames region	131,490	961,004	288,111
South Thames region	123,920	851,819	260,783
South and West region	94,534	828,535	193,640
West Midlands region	88,513	643,408	172,177
North-west region	92,188	889,850	221,207
Special health authorities	1,781	5,857	3,765
Total England	790,377	6,216,774	1,643,199

Source:

1. The annual financial returns of NHS trusts.
2. The annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.

Notes:

1. The figures are provisional.
2. The figures are not directly comparable with those of earlier years due to changes in the definitions of the staff categories.
3. The figures are based upon gross costs including employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions.
4. The figures given are for hospital and community health services only. Family health services authorities and other health bodies are excluded as comparable figures are not collected centrally.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total figure in performance-related pay given to former family health service authority mangers for recruiting new GPs to fundholding between 1990–91 and 1995–96. [14845]

Mr. Malone: Such information is not collected centrally.

NHS Nurses

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the *(a)* morale and *(b)* recruitment pattern of NHS nurses. [14781]

Mr. Horam: Morale and recruitment issues are matters for local health service employers. Evidence is considered by the Review Body for Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine and its conclusions are published in annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

On 29 January, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced a £32 million initiative to enhance the existing policies to recruit and retain, and encourage the return to work of nursing staff.

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department define as severe, moderate and slight side effects of the drug Lariam; what other definitions of the severity of side effects have been put to him by *(a)* the manufacturer of the drug and *(b)* independent scientists; what information he has obtained on the rates of incidence of these side effects; and to what extent the rate of incidence calculated by different parties varies. [15202]

Mr. Malone: There are no internationally defined standards for defining the severity of side effects; therefore the Department does not categorise the side effects of medicines, including Lariam, as severe, moderate or slight. Clinicians assess the rates of incidence of side effects from their patients and report to the Medicines Control Agency on a yellow card.

Information on the incidence of the side effects of Lariam is available from various clinical studies. Different criteria and methodologies are used for the definition of the severity of an adverse reaction. However, these studies show that serious adverse reactions are rare.

Infant Mortality

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outcome of the tendering process for the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the service specification and contract. [15442]

Mr. Horam: A contract was signed for the management of the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy with the Maternity and Child Health Research Consortium on 7 March 1996 and took effect from 1 April 1996.

Copies of the service specification—or "statement of requirements"—have been placed in the Library.

The contract contains commercial information that was supplied in confidence and is not, therefore, available for disclosure.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been allocated to the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy for the financial year 1996–97; and how much has been allocated for *(a)* central organisations and analysis, *(b)* allocations to regions and *(c)* other purposes. [15439]

Mr. Horam: The total amount allocated to the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy in the 1996–97 financial year is £2,039 million.

The other financial information requested is contained within the contract, is commercially confidential and is not, therefore, available for disclosure.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for disseminating the report of the evaluation of the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [15443]

Mr. Horam: No evaluation has yet taken place.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the full costs of the tendering process for the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) of 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *525-28*. [15456]

Mr. Horam: The estimated cost is £11,000.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he uses to decide on the membership of the national advisory body for the confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy; and for what reasons representatives of Wales and Northern Ireland do not have observer status on the body. [15444]

Mr. Horam: Membership of the national advisory body is designed to cover a range of professions, interest groups and perspectives. This includes knowledge of practices in different parts of the country. It is not a representative body.

The role of the national advisory body has changed since April 1996 and it is appropriate for its size to be reduced accordingly.

Fluoridation

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the correlation between the incidence of dental caries among schoolchildren and the proportion of fluoride in the water over the last 10 years *(a)* in England and *(b)* in the north-west; and if he will make a statement. [15630]

Mr. Malone: During the last 10 years, the British Fluoridation Society has produced a series of national dental health league tables on levels of tooth decay in five, 12 and 14-year-olds using data from the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry surveys of children's dental health. These league tables show that, in general, districts with the best oral health were fluoridated. Most of the worst districts for tooth decay were not fluoridated; a number of these are in the north-west. BFS leaflets showing the league tables will be placed in the Library.

Pharmaceutical Donations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column, *119*, if he will seek through the World Health Organisation to ensure that other nations do not offer financial incentives to companies to donate pharmaceuticals overseas; and if he will make a statement. [15631]

Mr. Malone: At the World Health Assembly in May 1996, the United Kingdom supported a resolution which promoted new World Health Organisation drug donations guidelines and urged their publication. The aim of these guidelines is to prevent the unsolicited donations of drugs and the overpricing of such drugs. We will place copies of the "Essential Drugs Monitor" publication which includes the guidelines in the Library.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column 279, on what date membership of the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority will be finalised; and if he will make a statement. [15632]

Mr. Horam: The membership of the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority will be finalised as soon as possible. Appointments will be announced at that time.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court Waiting Times

Mr. Straw: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the percentage of defendants *(a)* on bail and *(b)* in custody who were committed for trial at the Crown court in 1996 and waited (i) less than eight weeks and (ii) less than 16 weeks before being dealt with. [15725]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Jack Straw, dated 14 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the waiting times for defendants on bail and in custody committed for trial to the Crown Court in 1996.

	Less than 8 weeks per cent.	*Less than 16 weeks per cent.*
Bail	56	80
Custody	59	78

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 17 February 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what cases of surreptitious recording of telephone conversations and other complaints of surveillance falling outside the scope of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 *(a)* have been brought against the Government and *(b)* have been drawn to the attention of Ministers; and what steps (i) have been and (ii) are proposed to be taken by the Government in consequence, with special reference to the implementation of compliance measures. [15440]

Mr. Howard: The Interception of Communications Act 1985 is concerned only with the interception of communications in the course of transmission by post or by means of a public telecommunications system, and not with other forms of surveillance. I am aware of three cases regarding alleged interception of telephone calls outside the scope of the Act since it came into force. One of these is currently before the European Court of Human Rights and the other two were decided in 1994: one by the Court of Appeal and the other by the House of Lords. Two cases involving police surveillance operations have been drawn to my attention. One is currently before the European Commission on Human Rights and the other was decided by the House of Lords in July 1996. The Police Bill, which is currently before the House, places police operations involving interference with property on a statutory basis.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards exist to protect the privacy of people against interference with private telephone conversations; and what inadequacies in the present law have been identified in research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated. [15432]

Mr. Howard: Under the Interception of Communications Act 1985, it is a criminal offence intentionally to intercept a communication in the course of its transmission by means of a public telecommunications system except in obedience to a warrant issued by the Secretary of State or in certain other circumstances described in section 1 of the Act. Section 6 of the Act requires arrangements to be made to ensure that disclosure of material intercepted under warrant is kept to the minimum that is necessary. The legislation is kept under review.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his consent is required before the police intercept calls on mobile phones. [16248]

Mr. Howard: The Interception of Communications Act 1985 provides that communications may lawfully be intercepted in the course of their transmission by means of a public telecommunications system only in obedience to a warrant issued by the Secretary of State or in certain other circumstances specified in section 1(2) and (3) of the Act. This applies equally to mobile and fixed telephone systems.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to review the effectiveness of the current provisions to prevent undue pain and suffering to live animals used in experiments. [14986]

Mr. Sackville: The operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 is currently being reviewed by the Animal Procedures Committee. I understand that it hopes to submit a first report to my right hon. and learned Friend by the end of July this year.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many lethal dose toxicity tests on animals have been authorised over each of the last five years for which figures are available. [14987]

Mr. Sackville: The number of these procedures performed is published annually in "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain". The latest figures available are for the calender year 1995. The figures for acute lethal toxicity are:

Year	*Number*
1995	[1]148,708
1994	[2]116,493
1993	[2]154,880
1992	[2]153,222
1991	[2]131,760

[1] Table 12.
[2] Table 14(8) and 14(9).

Differences in the way these types of procedures are now classified mean that direct comparison between the 1995 figure and those for earlier years is not possible.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make representations to *(a)* pharmaceutical and *(b)* other commercial companies undertaking tests on live animals to move towards alternative methods of testing. [14988]

Mr. Sackville: All applicants for project licences, commercial or otherwise, are required by the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to consider the use of non-animal tests, where they are available and where they are consistent with the achievement of the scientific objectives of the project.

The Home Office is also working with regulatory agencies and with organisations representing commercial interests to encourage the use of alternative methods of testing.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to encourage provision for alternative methods to experimentation on live animals for basic research in toxicity testing and drug development; and if he will make a statement. [14989]

Mr. Sackville: Research on alternative methods is funded through the research budget of the Animal Procedures Committee. The Government support the operations of the European centre for the validation of

alternative methods in co-ordinating research into alternative methods across all areas of scientific activity which use animals in regulated procedures. This includes methods to reduce the number of animals, to refine the severity of procedures, and to replace animal use.

Officials meet regulatory agencies and other Government Departments to establish principles for the use of animals in safety testing. In addition, all applicants for project licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 are required to consider the use of alternatives where these are available.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those organisations which have received Government grants for research into alternatives to experimentation on live animals indicating in each case the amount of the grant for each of the last five years. [14990]

Mr. Sackville: The following organisations have received grants through the Animal Procedures Committee:

	£
Calendar year 1992	
Fund for Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments, Nottingham	31,500
Department of Microbiology, University of Glasgow	6,785
Division of Biologics, Porton Down	14,557
Department of Microbiology, Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham	13,395
Department of Biomedical Science and Biomedical Ethics, University of Birmingham	20,075
ICI Central Toxicology Laboratory and Department of Zoology, University of Nottingham	44,000
Institute of Cancer Research, Sutton	28,750
Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge	30,000
Welsh School of Pharmacy, University of Wales	31,380
Department of Toxicology, St. Bartholomews Hospital, London	21,603
Department of Animal Husbandry, University of Bristol	35,546
Royal Veterinary College, London	32,000
Hoechst Animal Health, Milton Keynes	23,763
Department of Applied Statistics, University of Reading	41,075
National Institute for Biomedical Standards and Control, Potters Bar	33,500
Calendar year 1993	
Royal Veterinary College, London	33,314
ICI Central Toxicology Laboratory and Department of Zoology, University of Nottingham	44,000
Biomedical Sciences Division, Kings College, London	23,645
Department of Pharmacology, University of Glasgow	38,000
Institute of Cancer Research, Sutton	32,343
Central Veterinary Laboratory, Weybridge	45,974
Department of Toxicology, St. Bartholmews Hospital	34,304
Department of Microbiology, University of Glasgow	3,209
Hoechst Animal Health, Milton Keynes	26,010
Department of Animal Husbandry University of Bristol	22,780
Applied Statistics, University of Reading	41,250
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, Potters Bar	36,000
Calendar year 1994	
Royal Veterinary College, London	42,755
ICI Central Toxicology Laboratory and Department of Zoology, University of Nottingham	36,000
Institute of Cancer Research, Sutton	22,880
Department of Clinical Veterinary Science, University of Bristol	25,034
Department of Toxicology, St. Bartholomews Hospital, London	35,107
Hoechst Animal Health, Milton Keynes	22,750
Department of Applied Statistics, University of Reading	45,052
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, Potters Bar	39,000
Calendar year 1995	
Institute of Cancer Research, Sutton	12,320
Department of Clinical Veterinary Science, University of Bristol	13,480
Department of Toxicology, St. Bartholomews Hospital, London	16,000
Hoechst Animal Health, Milton Keynes	25,250
Department of Animal Husbandry, University of Bristol	30,000
Department of Applied Statistics, University of Reading	16,485
Royal Veterinary College, London	11,025
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, Potters Bar	30,000
Central Public Health Laboratory, London	16,820
Department of Surgery, University of Edinburgh	7,634
Department of Biological Sciences, Heriot-Watt University	14,673
Moredun Research Institute, Edinburgh	13,379
Department of Pharmacology, University of Glasgow	5,500
Calendar year 1996	
Hoechst Animal Health, Milton Keynes	7,000
Central Public Health Laboratory, London	37,820
Department of Surgery, University of Edinburgh	8,280
Department of Biological Sciences, Heriot-Watt University	27,045
Moredun Research Institute, Edinburgh	13,379
Department of Pharmacology, University of Glasgow	12,830
Sheffield Hybridomas, University of Sheffield	13,810

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Cases Review Commission will publish its code of practice. [15596]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Criminal Cases Review Commission will take on responsibility for considering cases on 31 March 1997. It will then determine in what form to make available information about the way it will carry out its work.

Obscenity Law

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions have taken place under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 for material found on the Internet in the last two years. [15851]

Mr. Sackville: Court proceedings data held centrally for offences under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 do not identify the type of medium used.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the interdepartmental working group on obscenity has met; on what dates; and what subjects have that discussed. [156845]

Mr. Sackville: The interdepartmental group on obscenity has met seven times so far. The main subjects discussed have been the availability of pornographic material on the Internet and self-regulation by Internet service providers; police enforcement of the law on obscenity and child pornography; the display of indecent publications in newsagents; guidance on the sexual contents of teenage magazines; the international treaties

on obscenity; the workings of the Obscene Publications Act 1959; unlicensed sex establishments; satellite pornography; the Home Office research study "Testing obscenity: an international comparison of laws and controls relating to obscene material"; and Lord Halsbury's Bill on obscenity. The group has met on the following dates:

27 March 1995

6 June 1995

21 September 1995

30 January 1996

14 May 1996

26 July 1996

24 September 1996

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* consultations and *(b)* discussions are being undertaken on a definition of obscenity to replace that in the Obscene Publications Act 1959. [15846]

Mr. Sackville: The Government have undertaken no formal consultations or discussions on the definition of obscenity contained in the 1959 Act. We are, however, aware of the concerns expressed in some quarters about the continuing appropriateness of the test, and undertook to follow up any possible ways forward that might emerge from consideration of Lord Halsbury's Bill on this subject. It is clear that there is as yet no consensus on a workable alternative approach.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements the Government have put in place to monitor the effectiveness of the Internet Watch Foundation in reducing child pornography on the Internet. [15847]

Mr. Sackville: Officials have held meetings with the Internet Watch Foundation to discuss its work, and we receive reports from the foundation providing regular updates on its progress.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 in the past 15 years; and how many of these took place in courts outside London; [15848]

(2) how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been under the Protection of Children Act 1978 in the past 15 years; and how many of these took place in courts outside London. [15849]

Mr. Sackville: The information is given in the table:

Number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates courts and convicted[1] at all courts for offences under (a) the Obscene Publications Act 1959[2] and (b) the Protection of Children Act 1978[3] by area, 1980 to 1995

England and Wales

		Obscene Publications Act 1959[2]			*Protection of Children Act 1978[3]*		
Year		*Metropolitan Police Area[4]*	*Other Forces*	*England and Wales*	*Metropolitan Police Area[4]*	*Other Forces*	*England and Wales*
1980	Prosecutions	104	79	183	—	13	13
	Convictions	72	12	84	—	13	13
1981	Prosecutions	199	208	407	2	11	13
	Convictions	91	132	223	2	12	14
1982	Prosecutions	118	164	282	—	9	9
	Convictions	119	115	234	2	10	12
1983	Prosecutions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Convictions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1984	Prosecutions	63	520	583	4	14	18
	Convictions	94	335	429	4	15	19
1985	Prosecutions	29	246	275	8	14	22
	Convictions	43	183	226	7	17	24
1986	Prosecutions	34	95	129	—	10	10
	Convictions	49	77	126	1	10	11
1987	Prosecutions	17	104	121	2	21	23
	Convictions	22	71	93	7	22	29
1988	Prosecutions	50	108	158	3	29	32
	Convictions	45	85	130	5	26	31
1989	Prosecutions	40	85	125	3	41	44
	Convictions	32	64	96	6	33	39
1990	Prosecutions	53	121	174	6	38	44
	Convictions	25	91	116	4	31	35
1991	Prosecutions	227	136	363	3	37	40
	Convictions	102	116	218	7	32	39
1992	Prosecutions	105	108	213	5	41	46
	Convictions	89	83	172	5	39	44
1993	Prosecutions	206	87	293	9	33	42
	Convictions	140	69	209	10	27	37
1994	Prosecutions	215	94	309	4	36	40
	Convictions	187	79	266	2	25	27
1995	Prosecutions	219	138	357	9	44	53
	Convictions	154	105	259	6	38	44

[1] Includes persons proceeded against in earlier years or for other offences.
[2] Obscene Publications Act 1959 as amended by the Obscene Publications Act 1964.
[3] Protection of Children Act 1978 as amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 section 84.
[4] Includes the City of London.
n/a = Not available.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many items have been seized under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 in the past 15 years. [15850]

Mr. Sackville: This information is not collected centrally.

Repatriated Prisoners (Sentences)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the sentencing provisions set out in chapter I of part II of the Crime (Sentences) Bill will apply to prisoners who are repatriated to England and Wales from overseas in order to serve the remainder of their sentences. [16640]

Mr. Maclean: Prisoners repatriated to England and Wales, whose offences overseas are committed after the commencement of the provisions set out in chapter I of part II of the Crime (Sentences) Bill, will be treated as if the balances to serve here of their overseas sentences were their sentences for the purposes of this jurisdiction, and in particular for the purposes of earned early release and post-release supervision. They will be eligible to earn early release on the balance to serve of their original sentences accordingly. Where the balance to serve is more than 12 months' imprisonment, they will be required to undergo a period of post-release supervision equal to 25 per cent. of the balance to serve in this country or three months, whichever is the greater.

In calculating the balance of the prisoner's sentence remaining to be served following repatriation here, account will be taken, as at present, of the time the prisoner has spent in prison abroad, including, where applicable, any remand time, with any remission to which he is eligible for that period. Both periods will be deducted from the original sentence.

In appropriate cases, the resulting balance will be further reduced by a period equal to that of the post-release supervision period which the prisoner will be required to undergo following release from custody. Accordingly, the time to be served in prison by a repatriated prisoner on return here and the required period of supervision, when added together, will not exceed the remaining part of the term of the sentence imposed in the foreign jurisdiction.

This method of calculating the period to be served in prison will not apply to prisoners repatriated from foreign jurisdiction operating sentencing provisions equivalent to those contained in chapter I of part II of the Crime (Sentences) Bill.

Prisoners seeking to be repatriated from overseas will continue to receive full information about the way in which their sentences will be administered on their return here. This will enable them to make an informed decision about whether to consent to repatriation.

DEFENCE

Resolution Class Submarines

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list when *(a)* HMS Resolution, *(b)* HMS Revenge, *(c)* HMS Repulse and *(d)* HMS Renown were unavailable because they were undergoing docking and essential defects or refit in the last five years. [15716]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Ships Support Agency, I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Roger Babington to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 17 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the refits and defect rectification periods of Resolution Class submarines during the last five years, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency.

Resolution Class submarines were subject to an annual 'programmed' docking between refits. Occasionally operational requirements lead to the submarines being docked at short notice, which are reflected in the table below as 'unprogrammed' dockings. The total number of dockings, both programmed and unprogrammed, for the four Resolution Class submarines during the last five years is reflected in the table below:

		Programmed	*Unprogrammed*
Resolution	1992	46 days	
	1993	35 days	10 days
	1994	13 days	
Renown	1992	365 days	
	1993	70 days	31 days
	1994	17 days	4 days
	1995	13 days	
Revenge	1992	20 days	
Repulse	1992	20 days	15 days
	1993	52 days	5 days
	1994	8 days	13 days
	1995	37 days	
	1996		15 days

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when *(a)* HMS Resolution, *(b)* HMS Revenge, *(c)* HMS Repulse and *(d)* HMS Renown performed their last patrols. [15714]

Mr. Soames: I have decided under exemption 1 of the code of practice on access to government information to continue to withhold details of the strategic submarine operational programme. However, the decommissioning dates of the four Resolution class submarines were:

HMS Revenge: 25 July 1994

HMS Resolution: 22 October 1994

HMS Renown: 24 February 1996

HMS Repulse: 28 August 1996.

Military Personnel (Wales)

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel are temporarily stationed in Wales for training purposes each year. [16033]

Mr. Soames: Statistics are not maintained in a way that would enable this information to be provided except at disproportionate cost. However, the hon. Member may be interested to note the following.

The Royal Navy has no major establishments in Wales. There are a number of Reserve training centres which cater for the training of local volunteers, and small numbers of RN personnel undertake elements of resource and initiative training from time to time in some areas of the Principality.

For the Army, collective training in Wales is conducted at two Army field training centres, Sennybridge and Castlemartin, and five divisional ranges and training areas. Sennybridge and Castlemartin accounted for 389,462 and 80,000 man training days respectively during 1995–96. The infantry training centre at Brecon and the joint service mountain training centre at Tywyn accommodate respectively 2,400 to 2,700 and 1,100 to 1,300 students per year.

The RAF has approximately 6,200 training places in Wales each year. This includes outdoor activity/leadership training at the RAF resource and initiative training centre at Fairbourne, the joint service adventurous training instructors school at Llanrwst and the joint service hang gliding and paragliding centre at Crickhowell, but excludes detachments at RAF Valley, summer camps and station-organised adventurous training expeditions.

As their name implies, joint service establishments cater for personnel from more than one service and, indeed, some foreign and Commonwealth training.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel are stationed in Wales. [16029]

Mr. Soames: On 1 April 1996 there were some 5,400 military personnel stationed in Wales.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many married quarters there are for military personnel in Wales. [16030]

Mr. Soames: There are currently 2,169 married quarters in Wales.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel were recruited in Wales during the last decade. [16031]

Mr. Soames: Information about the number of military personnel recruited in Wales during the past 10 year is not available for all three services. Such information that is available about recruitment in Wales is detailed:

Royal Navy: 529 in the last 5 years

Army: 10,292 personnel since 1987

Royal Air Force: 825 from 1991–92—to date.

The figures for all three services represent personnel recruited through careers offices located in Wales.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of *(a)* RAF, *(b)* Army and *(c)* Navy units in each Welsh county. [16032]

Mr. Soames: The information is as follows:

County	*Units*		
	RAF	*Army*	*Navy*
Clwyd	2	6	—
Dyfed	2	5	2
Gwent	—	6	—
Gwynedd	2	2	—
Mid Glamorgan	—	3	—
Powys	—	3	—
South Glamorgan	2	5	1
West Glamorgan	1	3	—

Note:
Figures include Reserve Centres and exclude Careers Information Offices.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel give their next of kin as resident in Wales. [16035]

Mr. Soames: Departmental records show that as at 14 February 1997 the numbers of service personnel who give their next of kin as resident in Wales are as follows:

Royal Navy[1]: 1,341

Army: 4,662

Royal Air Force: 1,360

[1]Includes Royal Marines.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the average annual number of military discharges in Wales for *(a)* medical and *(b)* psychiatric reasons in the past five years. [16036]

Mr. Soames: This answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Quantock School

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if his Department intends to send the Office for Standards in Education report on the Quantock school, Somerset, to the parents of service families whose children attend the school; [16118]

(2) if he will make a statement on the suitability of the Quantock school, Somerset, to remain on the service children education authorities admissible schools list; [16120]

(3) what recommendations the Service Children's Education Agency has made to his Department in response to the Ofsted report on Quantock school, Taunton; and if he will make a statement. [16122]

Mr. Soames: Following the recent Ofsted inspection and report on Quantock school, the Service Children's Education Agency has recommended that copies of the report should be sent to service parents whose children attend the school and that the weaknesses identified in that report should be drawn to the attention of parents, that the school should be removed from the admissible school list and that parents who currently have children at the school should be allowed to place them in other schools if they so wish. Quantock school may be considered for readmission to the admissible list at a later date if it is able to meet the criteria proposed for inclusion on the list.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many pupils attending the Quantock school,

Somerset, are participants in the service children's boarding school allowance scheme; and at what cost to his Department. [16117]

Mr. Soames: The total number of service children attending Quantock school, and whose parents were in receipt of boarding school allowance, was 48 in the autumn term 1996—the latest term for which detailed statistics are available. Information on how much individual schools have received in BSA payments is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Boarding Schools Allowance Scheme

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of state for Defence what was the cost to his Department of the service children's boarding schools allowance scheme in the last year for which figures are available. [16119]

Mr. Soames: The cost to my Department of boarding school allowance for financial year 1995–96, the last year for which figures are available, was £110.6 million.

Land Mines

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the international agreements covering the sale and manufacture of land mines and related equipment, and indicate which have been signed by the United Kingdom. [16004]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Amended protocol II to the United Nations convention on prohibitions or restrictions on the use of certain conventional weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects regulates the use and transfer of certain types of mines. This amended protocol was adopted on 3 May 1996. The United Kingdom signed the convention on 10 April 1981. There are no international agreements covering the manufacture of land mines or related equipment.

Bowman Project

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on awarding the contract for the Bowman project. [15807]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Procurement options for the Bowman production phase are currently being evaluated by the Ministry of Defence. A decision on the way ahead will be announced shortly.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate his Department has made of the extra cost of sustaining Clansman during the delay in ordering Bowman. [15808]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The net additional cost of maintaining Clansman in service owing to delays to the Bowman programme is estimated to be some £8 million.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the impact on operational efficiency in the Army of the delay in the Bowman project; and if he will make a statement. [15809]

Mr. Arbuthnot: We expect Bowman to enter service in 2002. Until then, the Clansman family of radios will remain in service and provide a worthwhile, though reducing, capability.

Firing Ranges (Schools)

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Government policy on the use of school land and premises as locations for armouries and firing ranges. [15884]

Mr. Soames: We often work in partnership with schools to promote the benefits of the cadet force movement to young people. Where possible, training facilities, including armouries and ranges, are provided in co-operation with local schools on their premises. This provides a secure and convenient basis for cadet force activities.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost for the construction and provision of a firing range and armoury at Longhill high school, Brighton. [15887]

Mr. Soames: The estimated cost for the construction of an armoury and conversion of existing accommodation into a firing range at Longhill high school, Brighton is £95,000.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those schools in the state and local education authority sector which have had provided for them a school armoury and firing ranges by the Minister of Defence. [15886]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Polaris

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *128–29*, for what reasons the operating costs of Polaris *(a)* fell in the financial year 1984–85, *(b)* rose in the financial year 1985–86 and *(c)* fell in the financial year 1988–89. [15722]

Mr. Soames: Details of calculations pertaining to the 1980s are no longer available. Annual cost changes would have resulted primarily from the operational and maintenance cycles of individual submarines.

RAF Bases (Running Costs)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the annual running costs of *(a)* RAF Marham, *(b)* RAF Honington and *(c)* RAF Bruggen in financial years (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96. [15715]

Mr. Soames: The annual running costs, including staff costs, utilities, contract services and property management of RAF Marham, RAF Honington and RAF Bruggen in the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96 were as follows:

£ million

Station	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
RAF Marham	62	64
RAF Brüggen	97	98
RAF Honington	31	30

Welsh Regiments

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Welsh regiments have been involved in armed conflict since 1987. [16034]

Mr. Soames: None. However, a detachment of the Queens Dragoon Guards provided reconnaissance for 7th Armoured Brigade and served as a sub-unit with the 16/5th the Queens Royal Lancers in the Gulf in 1990.

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the casualty figures for Welsh regiments in *(a)* the Gulf war, *(b)* Cyprus and *(c)* Northern Ireland since 1967. [16037]

Mr. Soames: Casualty figures, defined in terms of those killed in action, including those who died of wounds, for the Welsh regiments are:

Gulf war: 0

Cyprus: 3

Northern Ireland since 1967: 17.

Empty Homes (Disposal)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress his Department has made in the disposal of empty homes; and if he will make a statement. [16606]

Mr. Soames: The targets for disposal of 1,500 homes by April 1996 and a further 2,500 by the end of summer 1996 was not only achieved but significantly exceeded, as the total number of disposals reached 5,348 properties.

Gurkhas

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the result of his Department's review of Gurkha terms and conditions of service; and if he will make a statement. [16554]

Mr. Soames: Terms and conditions of service for Gurkhas serving in the British Army are set out in the 1947 tripartite agreement—TPA—between the Governments of Nepal, India and the United Kingdom to enable Gurkha troops to be recruited and employed in the Indian and British Armies on a broadly comparable basis. The last major review of Gurkha terms and conditions of service took place in 1955. Since then, the British Army Gurkhas have been increasingly widely deployed and dispersed. Conditions of service have necessarily been adjusted to take account of local factors, although basic pay and the level of accompanied service have not departed from the guidelines set out in the TPA. Over time, such adjustments have led to significant anomalies. For example, Gurkhas are currently paid markedly different rates, depending on the country in which they serve, their marital status and whether they are accompanied, with a consequent threat to the morale of those on significantly lower incomes.

Taking advantage of the drawdown in Hong Kong and the relocation of most of the brigade to the UK, the MOD has undertaken a major review to restore fairness and equity across the brigade. As a result, revised terms and conditions of service will be introduced from July 1997. The main elements are set out:

Basic pay will continue to be set in accordance with the Indian army pay code in line with the requirements of the TPA, but a universal addition to basic pay will be introduced in place of the current anomalous system of allowances. This will standardise Gurkha pay across different geographical areas, and bring Gurkha take-home pay broadly into line with that received by British soldiers. So far as Gurkhas stationed in the United Kingdom are concerned, no soldier will suffer a reduction and many will gain. In Brunei and Nepal, the great majority of soldiers—those who are married unaccompanied ranks—will benefit from the changes. Gurkha married accompanied personnel in Brunei and Nepal will, however, experience a reduction in their take-home pay, which is currently significantly higher than that of other members of the brigade.

Married accompanied service is to be made available in the United Kingdom. In keeping with the tripartite agreement, which specifies that up to 25 per cent. of Gurkha officers and soldiers will be provided with family accommodation, sergeants and below will be granted one three-year accompanied tour and the more senior ranks will be permanently accompanied. This reflects the basis upon which married accompanied service is available in Brunei and Nepal and was provided to those serving in Hong Kong. Some 450 married quarters will be made available at locations in the United Kingdom where about 2,000 members of the brigade of Gurkhas will be stationed. We expect that under these arrangements some 900 Gurkha dependants, wives and children, will come to the United Kingdom.

Gurkha parents will have the option of sending their children to school in the UK or of taking advantage of a new Gurkha education allowance to enable them to enjoy the benefits of continuity of education within the Nepali system. We expect that most will choose the latter course, relying on Nepali boarding schools and looking to relatives to provide care and support for the children in their absence. There will be an entitlement of one free flight a year to enable children to be united with their parents in the UK during the long Nepali school holiday.

The present entitlement of Gurkha soldiers to long leave every three years will remain. This recognises the continuing importance we attach to keeping the Gurkha soldier in touch with his home culture and roots. But the entitlement will be reduced from six to five months to take account of improved internal communications in Nepal.

We also intend to transfer resettlement training from Nepal to the United Kingdom. This will provide Gurkhas with a much wider choice of training, while ensuring they continue to undertake a reorientation course in Nepal before discharge from the British Army. We intend to retain the Queens Gurkha officer commission for the majority of officers in Gurkha units, but we shall also take the opportunity to introduce a new Gurkha short service commission for a limited number of suitably qualified Gurkha officers to allow them to gain wider employment within the wider British Army.

I am confident that this package represents a significant improvement over current arrangements while continuing to respect the tripartite agreement. It also recognises and

gives continued substance to the Gurkhas' position as an integral and valued component of the British Army. I am sure that it will be well received by the brigade.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Sports Council Lottery Fund

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many sports have benefited from awards made by the Sports Council lottery fund; and if she will list them together with the total value of the awards for each year since the introduction of the national lottery.
[13522]

Mr. Sproat: Fifty-nine sports have benefited in England from awards made by the lottery sports fund to a total value of £371,374,314. In 1995, 607 awards were made, totalling £104,731,747. In 1996, 1,094 awards were made, totalling £245,722,611. To February 1997, 135 awards have been made, totalling £20,919,956. Full details are provided in the table:

Sports Council Awards

Sport		*Year of Award* 1995	1996	1997	Total
Angling	Total award amount	£118,923	£411,139	£39,850	£569,912
	Number of awards	3	15	2	20
Archery	Total award amount	£11,331	£70,320	0	£81,651
	Number of awards	2	1	0	3
Athletics	Total award amount	£11,487,187	£9,237,754	£1,674,900	£22,399,841
	Number of awards	11	18	3	32
Badminton	Total award amount	£2,208,929	£3,084,362	£555,746	£5,849,037
	Number of awards	11	11	5	27
Basketball	Total of amount	£2,213,425	£7,499,116	£787,863	£10,500,404
	Number of awards	7	16	2	25
Billiards/snooker	Total award amount	£28,857	£27,469	0	£56,326
	Number of awards	2	1	0	3
Bobsleigh	Total award amount	£62,556	0	0	£62,556
	Number of awards	1	0	0	1
Bowls	Total award amount	£4,529,712	£7,999,746	£832,120	£13,361,578
	Number of awards	62	112	19	193
Boxing	Total award amount	£83,304	£63,240	0	£146,544
	Number of awards	3	4	0	0
Canoeing	Total award amount	£443,969	£2,221,709	£222,851	£2,888,529
	Number of awards	6	8	2	16
Caving	Total award amount	0	£18,975	0	£18,975
	Number of awards	0	2	0	2
Cricket	Total award amount	£2,896,489	£21,393,447	£4,330,719	£28,620,655
	Number of awards	95	176	15	286
Croquet	Total award amount	0	£14,437	£35,985	£50,422
	Number of awards	0	2	1	3
Cycling	Total award amount	£9,412	£436,661	0	£446,073
	Number of awards	1	5	0	6
Disability sport	Total award amount	£776,004	£809,340	£6,021	£1,591,365
	Number of awards	6	7	1	14
Dragon boat racing	Total award amount	0	£6,621	0	£6,621
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Equestrian	Total award amount	£529,601	£1,425,259	0	£1,954,860
	Number of awards	8	6	0	14
Exercise and fitness	Total award amount	£1,554,882	£2,028,133	£571,750	£4,154,765
	Number of awards	11	13	2	26
Football	Total award amount	£5,259,547	£19,714,924	£2,109,239	£27,083,710
	Number of awards	97	171	18	286
Gliding	Total award amount	£59,950	£138,065	£64,469	£262,484
	Number of awards	3	5	1	9
Golf	Total award amount	£428,280	£2,878,171	£38,239	£3,344,690
	Number of awards	5	13	1	19
Gymnastics	Total award amount	£1,794,507	£2,979,352	£94,109	£4,867,968
	Number of awards	12	15	3	30
Hang gliding	Total award amount	0	£13,199	£4,616	£17,815
	Number of awards	0	1	1	2
Hockey	Total award amount	£2,934,497	£11,247,436	£2,107,468	£16,289,401
	Number of awards	20	38	6	64
Ice skating	Total award amount	0	£12,500,000	0	£12,500,000
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Judo	Total award amount	£200,000	£306,972	0	£506,972
	Number of awards	1	3	0	4
Lacrosse	Total award amount	£32,744	0	0	£32,744
	Number of awards	1	0	0	1
Motor sports	Total award amount	0	£46,550	£22,680	£69,230
	Number of awards	0	2	1	3

Sports Council Awards

Sport		Year of Award 1995	1996	1997	Total
Mountaineering	Total award amount	£683,701	£1,090,853	£22,445	£1,796,999
	Number of awards	4	10	2	16
Movement and dance	Total award amount	£276,000	£415,216	0	£691,216
	Number of awards	1	1	0	2
Multi sports	Total award amount	£17,135,491	£50,357,655	£1,154,154	£68,647,300
	Number of awards	34	63	5	102
Netball	Total award amount	£128,144	£6,535,095	£109,276	£6,772,515
	Number of awards	4	14	1	19
Orienteering	Total award amount	0	£4,721	0	£4,721
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Racketball	Total award amount	0	£45,000	0	£45,000
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Rambling	Total award amount	£2,070	£301,023	£4,324	£307,417
	Number of awards	1	2	1	4
Real tennis	Total award amount	£468,913	0	0	£468,913
	Number of awards	2	0	0	2
Roller skating	Total award amount	0	0	£27,950	£27,950
	Number of awards	0	0	1	1
Rowing	Total award amount	£1,344,295	£9,213,810	£1,533,640	£12,091,745
	Number of awards	12	12	2	26
Rugby league	Total award amount	£352,201	£973,285	0	£1,325,486
	Number of awards	5	9	0	14
Rugby union	Total award amount	£3,791,761	£5,860,022	£597,089	£10,248,872
	Number of awards	27	41	5	73
Sailing	Total award amount	£8,475,539	£2,733,339	£627,475	£11,836,353
	Number of awards	21	43	7	71
Sand and land yachting	Total award amount	0	£47,660	0	£47,660
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Shooting	Total award amount	£30,400	£257,935	0	£288,335
	Number of awards	2	7	0	9
Skateboarding	Total award amount	0	£151,965	0	£151,965
	Number of awards	0	2	0	2
Skiing	Total award amount	0	£218,360	0	£218,360
	Number of awards	0	2	0	2
Softball	Total award amount	£9,050	0	0	£9,050
	Number of awards	1	0	0	1
Squash	Total award amount	£1,223,954	£73,514	£255,500	£1,552,968
	Number of awards	7	2	1	10
Sub aqua	Total award amount	£58,922	£345,554	£44,600	£449,076
	Number of awards	4	23	4	31
Surf life saving	Total award amount	0	£49,145	0	£49,145
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Surfing	Total award amount	0	0	£5,845	£5,845
	Number of awards	0	0	1	1
Swimming	Total award amount	£24,815,642	£39,390,893	£949,005	£65,155,540
	Number of awards	23	39	6	68
Table tennis	Total award amount	£806,120	£3,150,078	0	£3,956,198
	Number of awards	8	10	0	18
Tennis	Total award amount	£5,589,805	£10,540,508	£2,090,028	£18,220,341
	Number of awards	78	149	16	243
Trampolining	Total award amount	£763,283	£91,740	0	£855,023
	Number of awards	3	3	0	6
Tug of war	Total award amount	0	£9,955	0	£9,955
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Volleyball	Total award amount	0	£7,046,075	0	£7,046,075
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Water skiing	Total award amount	£1,112,350	£26,000	0	£1,138,350
	Number of awards	2	1	0	3
Weightlifting	Total award amount	0	£196,762	0	£196,762
	Number of awards	0	7	0	7
Wrestling	Total award amount	0	£24,051	0	£24,051
	Number of awards	0	1	0	1
Grand totals		£104,731,747	£245,722,611	£20,919,956	£371,374,314
		607	1,094	135	1,836

Data up to and including February 1997 awards.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Towels

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what is the annual cost of *(a)* purchasing, *(b)* laundering and *(c)* distributing the individual hand towels supplied in washrooms throughout the House. [15723]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: *(a)* Hand towels are purchased when required, in blocks of 5,000, at a cost of £1.09 each. *(b)* The annual cost of laundering hand towels is £7,300. *(c)* The staff costs involved in distribution are £3,200 per annum.

New Parliamentary Building

Mr Wigley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what was the original estimate for the cost of building the new building for parliamentary use at Bridge street, Westminster; and what is his latest estimate of this cost. [16436]

Sir Raymond Powell: The House of Commons Commission approved the final sketch design estimate in 1993 at the prices then prevailing with an allowance forecasting the possible rate of inflation in construction costs until the work is completed in 2000. Since 1993, instructions have been given to the project team for various changes to the brief and the date when work is to start. These account for the difference between the 1993 forecast of £219 million and the current figure of £225 million.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Armoured Vehicles (Indonesia)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *708–709*, if the export licence includes *(a)* machine guns, *(b)* automatic cannon and *(c)* other weapons for installation in Indonesia. [14303]

Mr. Nelson: The licences issued to Procurement Services International and Alvis do not list any weapons for installation in Indonesia.

The Alvis armoured cars licensed for export are equipped with a 90 mm gun and two machine guns as standard. All but two of the other vehicles have either one or two machine guns fitted as standard.

The licence issued to Procurement Services International is for vehicles which were detailed in my reply of 23 January 1997. None of these vehicles is fitted with machine guns or automatic cannon.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *29*, if he will list the types and amounts of ammunition that are included in the export licence granted to Alvis. [14260]

Mr. Nelson: Details of goods listed on export licences are a matter between the company and the licensing authority. However, in this case, I can confirm that the export licence granted to Alvis covers a limited quantity of 90 mm ammunition and phosphorous grenades for acceptance testing and training purposes.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, columns *29–30*, if he will list the types and quantities of ammunition included in the licence for Procurement Services International. [14267]

Mr. Nelson: No ammunition was included in the licence issued to Procurement Services International.

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he will take to ensure that the nuclear installations inspectorate requires British Nuclear Fuels plc to adhere to appropriate safety regulations in respect of the highly radioactive waste tanks at Sellafield. [15467]

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 6 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *677*.

I have every confidence that the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate will continue to discharge its statutory responsibilities in the regulation of safety standards throughout the civil nuclear industry.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the expenses and allowances paid to parties and witnesses appearing before industrial tribunals. [16558]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Parties, witnesses and some unpaid representatives appearing before industrial tribunals may claim certain expenses and allowances. These have been reviewed recently by my Department. With effect from 1 April 1997, the following may be paid: travel expenses in excess of £5, including the costs of travel by public transport—standard class—or, if a private motor vehicle is used, a mileage allowance of 15p per mile; loss of earnings—or national insurance benefit which would otherwise be payable—subject to a maximum of £40 per day; an overnight allowance of £64.30 (inner London) or £54.30 (elsewhere) to meet hotel and other costs where a night's absence is unavoidable; and other reasonable expenses, subject to certain limits. Such expenses include interpreters' fees, essential child care costs and expenses incurred in securing locum cover.

The daily subsistence allowance presently paid to those absent from home for more than five hours is being withdrawn. The Government do not believe the continued payment of such allowances to those involved in essentially private law disputes is justified.

British Shipbuilders

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the external financing limit of British Shipbuilders. [16555]

Mr. Lang: The external financing limit has been adjusted from–£21 million to–£1 million. The original figure rested on the assumption that agreement would be

reached the latter with regard to a claim for payment to British Shipbuilders of £20 million. The matter has now gone to arbitration and receipt is not now expected in this financial year.

British Gas

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if British Gas plc will pay stamp duty on demerger. [16594]

Mr. Lang: Section 75 of the Finance Act 1986 makes provision for the exemption of demergers from stamp duty if certain criteria are met. The intention of the legislation is to ensure that demergers involving no real change of ownership, as is the case with the British Gas demerger, qualify for relief from the duty. There must be an issue of shares to all shareholders of the transferor company, in this case British Gas plc, and after the transfer of shares, the proportion of shares held by each shareholder in the transferor company must be the same as the proportion of shares held by those shareholders in the transferee company, in this case Centrica plc. Except for the Government's special share, the British Gas demerger meets these requirements. The Government intend to continue to hold a special share in British Gas plc which, after the demerger, will be known as BG plc. In order, therefore, to allow the British Gas demerger to qualify for exemption from stamp duty, prior to the demerger, two ordinary shares, one in BG plc and one in Centrica plc, will be transferred to the Secretary of State and, on the demerger taking effect, a further share in Centrica plc will be issued to the Secretary of State. These arrangements will ensure that the British Gas demerger meets the conditions for this relief.

Land Mines

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the British companies involved in *(a)* the manufacture and *(b)* the export of land mines and related equipment. [16003]

Mr. Nelson: I refer the hon. Member to the response given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Blaneau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 12 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *180–81*.

TREASURY

Taxes and National Insurance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will translate the column headed "Non-North Sea oil taxes and NICs" in table 4A9, page 88 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98", into cash figures at 1997–98 prices. [15253]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* The table shows the information requested. However, cash figures for tax receipts over a long run of years—even if measured at constant prices—are of only very limited interest if they are not set in the context of what has happened to national income over the same period. This is why the historical time series for spending, receipts and borrowing in tables 4.A8 and 4.A9 of the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report" are all expressed as ratios to gross domestic products.

Non-North sea taxes and NICs (£ billion, 1997–98 prices)

	Cash figure
1965–66	109.1
1966–67	107.9
1967–68	119.5
1968–69	135.1
1969–70	142.4
1970–71	144.1
1971–72	144.3
1972–73	143.5
1973–74	160.6
1974–75	168.2
1975–76	174.7
1976–77	186.5
1977–78	182.6
1978–79	180.8
1979–80	188.1
1980–81	188.6
1981–82	195.6
1982–83	199.8
1983–84	211.8
1984–85	216.7
1985–86	225.8
1986–87	244.6
1987–88	257.5
1988–89	266.3
1989–90	268.3
1990–91	253.0
1991–92	244.9
1992–93	232.3
1993–94	234.6
1994–95	252.3
1995–96	262.1
1996–97	268.9
1997–98	280.9
1998–99	292
1999–00	304
2000–01	316
2001–02	327

Non-North sea taxes and NICs are rebased to 1997–98 prices using the GDP deflator. Forecasts and projections of the GDP deflator were published in table 3.11 and 5A.1 of the 1996 "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13456]

Mrs. Angela Knight: It is not possible to provide the information in the form requested. However, I refer to the answers I gave on 14 January 1997 to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe), *Official Report*, columns *201–202*.

Deaths

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths from *(a)* influenza, *(b)* pneumonia and *(c)* bronchitis occurred during January 1997; and what were the equivalent figures for January (i) 1994, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 1996. [15215]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Rhodri Morgan, dated 17 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question on how many deaths occurred from influenza, pneumonia, and bronchitis during January 1997. The Director has asked me to reply in his absence.

The figures for England and Wales are given in the table below.

Deaths occurring in January, 1994 to 1997, England and Wales

	Influenza ICD9[1] 487	*Pneumonia ICD9[1] 480–486*	*Bronchitis ICD9[1] 466,491*
1994	28	6,245	461
1995	29	6,474	402
1996[2]	105	8,386	437
1997[2]	255	10,940	435

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision.

[2] Death occurrences for 1996 and 1997 are provisional. Figures for 1997 are the latest available. They will be incomplete due to some January deaths awaiting to be registered and added to the ONS database.

Dorneywood

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *421*, if he will list the dates *(a)* he and *(b)* his predecessor have been in residence at Dorneywood since 1993. [15656]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Since 1993, my predecessor and I have resided at Dorneywood on a number of occasions. These stays have not been at the expense of public funds or the taxpayer.

Profit-related Pay Schemes

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column *733*, how many companies notified the Inland Revenue of their intention of introducing a profit-related pay scheme during *(a)* the first eight months of 1997, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* 1994. [15657]

Mr. Jack: The available information is in the table.

	Number of applications for registration of profit-related pay schemes[1]
1994	7,200
1995	9,500
1996	12,800

[1] Rounded to the nearest 100.

From 1 January to 31 January 1997—the most recent period for which figures are available—the Inland Revenue received about 760 applications.

All these figures include some businesses which have previously had a registered scheme and some which have not.

HEALTH

GP Fundholders

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of fundholding *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* practices by health authority (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage of all general practitioners and practices. [13245]

Mr. Malone: Current year information on the number of fundholding practices and general practitioners is given in the table. These figures are available only as totals and not as percentages. The corresponding figures, including percentages, are available for 1995–96 and this information is in the Library.

Numbers of general practitioner fundholders—1996–97

Health authority	*Practices*	*GPs*	*Populations covered (percentage)*
Northern and Yorkshire			
East Riding	46	180	66
North Yorkshire	67	295	69
Bradford	41	165	60
Calderdale and Kirklees	24	98	35
Leeds	43	207	51
Wakefield	33	136	82
Tees	18	88	34
North Cumbria	19	96	48
County Durham	40	154	50
Northumberland	30	138	71
Gateshead and South Tyneside	19	81	41
Newcastle and North Tyneside	24	96	35
Sunderland	20	70	50
Trent			
Barnsley	16	40	35
North Debyshire	54	180	91
South Derbyshire	65	240	79
Doncaster	28	96	64
Leicestershire	60	238	50
Lincolnshire	61	217	66
North Nottinghamshire	19	76	41
Nottingham	27	80	26
Rotherham	21	56	49
Sheffield	45	159	52
South Humber	32	114	69
Anglia and Oxford			
Bedfordshire	20	96	34
Berkshire	63	262	62
Buckinghamshire	57	249	71
Cambridge and Huntingdon	12	58	26
East Norfolk	37	183	55
Northamptonshire	34	148	50
North West Anglia	25	108	49
Oxfordshire	40	194	54
Suffolk	25	136	37
North Thames			
Barking and Havering	49	111	62
Barnet	26	69	39
Brent and Harrow	65	168	64
Camden and Islington	9	18	10

Numbers of general practitioner fundholders—1996–97

Health authority	Practices	GPs	Populations covered (percentage)
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	61	130	38
East London and The City	41	94	35
Enfield and Haringey	18	55	27
East and North Hertfordshire	43	201	76
West Hertfordshire	48	214	77
Hillingdon	22	67	51
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	38	84	49
North Essex	59	212	57
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	60	116	59
South Essex	62	153	48
South Thames			
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	56	197	52
West Sussex	55	245	63
East Surrey	24	94	42
West Surrey	45	232	67
Kingston and Richmond	42	154	77
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	18	61	18
Bexley and Greenwich	36	110	54
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	39	137	44
Croydon	12	43	27
East Kent	54	180	58
West Kent	91	296	55
Bromley	12	36	27
South and West			
Avon	42	182	37
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	18	96	32
South and West Devon	33	152	39
North and East Devon	33	144	48
Dorset	46	208	50
Gloucestershire	25	124	39
Isle of Wight	15	63	84
North and Mid Hampshire	33	170	64
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	12	69	23
Somerset	29	128	44
Southampton and South West Hampshire	38	160	54
Wiltshire	45	183	60
West Midlands			
Birmingham	108	283	49
Coventry	32	79	54
Dudley	25	70	45
Herefordshire	18	77	80
Worcestershire	55	239	82
Sandwell	44	108	74
Shropshire	19	97	45
Solihull	21	114	82
South Staffordshire	43	144	55
North Staffordshire	48	124	55
Walsall	35	72	53
Warwickshire	59	220	84
Wolverhampton	18	49	39
North West			
Bury and Rochdale	62	170	81
East Lancashire	58	153	63
Liverpool	40	110	48
Manchester	20	64	25
Morecambe Bay	30	126	71
North Cheshire	19	85	52
North West Lancashire	35	121	50
Salford and Trafford	39	95	42
Sefton	23	71	47
South Cheshire	62	283	75
South Lancashire	24	66	46
Stockport	29	89	60
St. Helens and Knowsley	38	100	56
West Pennine	39	104	46
Wigan and Bolton	45	126	44
Wirral	28	94	49

Source:
NHS executive regional offices.

Senior House Officers (West Midlands)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the main findings of the inquiry of the chairman of the task force into the implementation of proposals in respect of medical senior house officers at the North Staffordshire medical assessment unit; and if he will make a statement. [14313]

Mr. Malone: The West Midlands regional task force on junior doctors' hours provides both formal and informal advice to local health authorities and trusts when necessary, as part of their on-going role in helping to ensure compliance with the new deal for junior doctors' hours. The issues raised are a matter for local discussion.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of additional senior medical house officers required in *(a)* North Staffordshire and *(b)* the West Midlands. [14314]

Mr. Malone: The postgraduate dean, with advice from the West Midlands regional task force on junior doctors' hours, is currently considering numbers of senior house officers in all areas of the west midlands to ensure an appropriate balance of doctors and to help to implement the new deal for junior doctors, hours, copies of which are available in the Library.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the West Midlands NHS trust the ratio of senior medical house officers to the number of acute medical admissions *(a)* in day-time hours and *(b)* out of hours. [14318]

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of admissions by time of day is not available centrally.

Staff Training (North Staffordshire)

Mr. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will visit the North Staffordshire NHS trust medical

assessment unit to congratulate staff on their achievements in respect of the gold standard in training initiatives. [14316]

Mr. Malone: We are always pleased to acknowledge the achievements of staff in the national health service. Unfortunately, due to commitments already made, both I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be unable to visit the unit in the foreseeable future. I have undertaken to write to the staff acknowledging their achievement.

Strokes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the recent publication "Stoke: National Tragedy, National Priority", published by the Stroke Association; and if he will make a statement; [15640]

(2) what measures he proposes to assist district stroke services. [15642]

(3) if he will make it his policy to ensure that all people who have had strokes are *(a)* treated as emergency cases by A and E units and *(b)* assessed and diagnosed at hospital shortly after admission. [15641]

Mr. Burns: We are sure that local health authorities will find the Stroke Association's publication "Stroke: National Tragedy, National Priority" a useful aid to commissioning services for its areas for people who have had a stroke.

The Department of Health has awarded the Stroke Association a number of grants, under the section 64 general scheme, for projects to enhance the provision of stroke services in primary care. Reducing the death rate from stroke is a target of "The Health of the Nation". This is supported by a number of high–profile campaigns such as promoting physical activity and sensible drinking and encouraging people to stop smoking. The national health service executive has produced recommendations on the provision of rehabilitation services for stroke patients which have been distributed to the NHS to assist local health authorities in making decisions about how to organise their services. Copies of this document—an effective health care bulletin entitled "Stroke Rehabilitation"—are available in the Library.

Decisions on when and where to refer for treatment are a clinical matter for the patient's doctor. Under the patients charter, patients in an accident and emergency department can expect to be seen immediately and have their need for treatment assessed. In addition, health authorities should set local standards on times patients can expect to wait to receive treatment in accident and emergency departments after their need for treatment has been assessed.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of junior doctors are working on *(a)* part-time contracts and *(b)* flexible training programmes. [15908]

Mr. Malone: At 30 September 1995, 3 per cent. of junior doctors were working on part-time contracts. Separate information on flexible training programmes is not collected centrally.

Blood Products

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which blood products the blood transfusion service sells to the private sector. [15721]

Mr. Horam: The bio products laboratory, which, like the former blood transfusion service, forms part of the National Blood Authority, manufactures a wide variety of blood products, which are sold both to the national health service and to the private sector.

Dentures

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received concerning the wish of denturists to be allowed to fit false teeth. [16225]

Mr. Malone: On several occasions, we have received representations from the Clinical Dental Technicians Associations requesting that the Dentists Act 1984 be amended.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were on the waiting list for operations in the north-west of England in 1979. [16160]

Mr. Horam: Information in the form requested is not available centrally.

Abortion

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that general practitioner fundholders who accept funding for abortion services provide those services. [16112]

Mr. Malone: The accountability framework for general practitioner fundholding EL (95)54 provides the mechanism for agreeing and reviewing fundholder plans and performance, including for the purchase of terminations of pregnancy.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to review the provision of abortion on the NHS by region. [16113]

Mr. Horam: None.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the schools offering assisted places in 1995–96 showing for each *(a)* the number of places offered, *(b)* the amount of income received and *(c)* the proportion of the school's intake covered by assisted places. [15490]

Mrs. Gillan: The table gives the information requested for the 293 schools participating in the assisted places scheme in England in the academic year 1995–96. Information on the proportion of each school's first year

intake covered by assisted places is not collected centrally. The table therefore shows total assisted pupil numbers as a proportion of total pupils on roll.

Assisted places scheme 1995–96 academic year

School name	APs offered	Cost £000s	Percentage of APs
Abbey School, Reading	116	126	4.90
Abingdon School	107	314	11.64
Ackworth School, Pontefract	31	92	6.06
Aldenham School, Elstree	35	221	8.26
Alice Ottley School, Worcester	90	333	12.52
Alleyn's School, Dulwich	208	950	17.96
Ardingly College, Haywards Heath	36	239	5.42
Arnold School, Blackpool	80	258	6.84
Ashford School, Kent	60	149	6.87
Ashville College	22	93	2.63
Austin Friars School	23	88	7.67
Bancroft's School, Woodford	80	312	8.40
Barnard Castle School	30	81	4.23
Bath High School GPDST	128	296	14.67
Batley Grammar School	275	794	49.73
Bedales School, Petersfield	10	22	0.62
Bedford High School	131	431	11.89
Bedford Modern School	132	511	13.00
Bedford School	131	557	9.45
Belevedere School GPDST Liverpool	185	512	27.51
Berkhamsted School	28	113	3.72
Berkhamsted School for Girls	34	94	4.68
Birkenhead High School GPDST	290	714	25.82
Birkenhead School	273	467	17.64
Bishop's Stortford College	55	338	8.99
Blackheath High School GPDST	108	323	15.93
Bloxham School, Banbury	26	160	7.32
Bolton School (Boys)	275	835	24.76
Bolton School (Girls)	276	767	20.59
Bootham School, York	35	153	9.65
Bradfield College, Reading	6	37	1.01
Bradford Girls Grammar	68	214	7.03
Bradford Grammar School	238	689	20.75
Brentwood School	136	439	8.84
Brighton and Hove High School GPDST	216	483	21.76
Brighton College	116	685	24.95
Bristol Cathedral School	151	424	28.54
Bristol Grammar School	291	835	21.96
Bromley High School GPDST	145	322	12.17
Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire	29	141	2.38
Bruton School for Girls	150	392	26.47
Burgess Hill School for Girls	34	122	4.21
Bury Grammar School (Boys)	220	586	25.06
Bury Grammar School (Girls)	255	642	22.42
Canford School, Wimborne	35	268	6.97
Carmel College, Wallingford	110	567	41.41
Casterton School, Cumbria	58	202	12.07
Caterham School	144	546	19.72
Central Newcastle High School GPDST	136	333	14.08
Charterhouse, near Godalming	10	68	1.11
Cheadle Hulme School	149	421	13.80
Cheltenham Ladies' College	35	207	3.92
Chigwell School	76	382	10.57
Christ's Hospital	41	263	5.10
Churcher's College, Petersfield	143	490	17.18
City of London Freemen's School, Ashtead	24	60	1.66
City of London School	151	679	16.17
City of London School for Girls	148	480	19.79
Clifton College, Bristol	70	418	6.16
Clifton High School, Bristol	62	215	7.97
Colfe's School, London SE12	221	650	19.82
Colston's Collegiate School, Bristol	101	470	14.76
Colston's Girls School	178	568	36.85
Coventry School, Bablake	150	586	21.61
Coventry School, King Henry VIII	147	268	9.49
Cranleigh School	46	218	4.89
Croham Hurst School, Croydon	35	116	7.23
Croydon High School GPDST	143	364	11.33
Culford School, Bury St. Edmunds	51	254	7.83
Dame Alice Harpur School	132	456	15.40
Dame Allan's Boys School, Newcastle	191	291	24.83
Dame Allan's Girls School	150	397	31.60
Dauntsey's School, Devizes	70	362	11.15
Denstone College, Uttoxeter	119	653	40.27
Derby High School	30	98	5.26
Douai School, Reading	35	168	17.33
Dover College	27	141	11.30
Downe House School, Newbury	34	141	3.59
Dulwich College	304	1,340	19.67
Durham School	50	274	11.21
Edgbaston C of E College for Girls	35	120	12.08
Edgehill College, Bideford	144	641	31.84
Ellesmere College	22	134	6.01
Eltham College, London SE9	126	495	15.42
Emanuel School, London SW11	338	1,178	41.29
Epsom College	39	147	4.03
Exeter School	170	551	20.78
Farnborough Hill School	244	450	27.62
Felsted School, Dunmow	63	383	9.32
Forest School, London E17	157	524	10.62
Framlingham College	23	124	2.99
Francis Holland School, London NW1	34	105	11.64
Friends School, Saffron Walden	106	496	26.42
Giggleswick School, Settle	30	121	5.84
Godolphin and Latymer School, London W6	191	734	24.69
Godolphin School, Salisbury	35	150	7.19
Gresham's School, Norfolk	10	85	1.52
Guildford High School for Girls	35	125	4.34
Haberdashers' Aske's School	253	855	17.56
Haberdashers' Aske's Schools for Girls	150	376	11.24
Haileybury and Imperial Service College	35	173	5.12
Hampton School	219	686	22.05
Harrogate Ladies' College	31	119	8.04
Headington School, Oxford	35	101	3.91
Heathfield School GPDST	21	43	3.16
Hereford Cathedral School	245	877	38.26
Highgate School	40	186	3.36
Hipperholme Grammar School	25	67	7.81
Holy Child School	30	135	10.68
Hulme Grammar, Boys, Oldham	220	620	26.13

Assisted places scheme 1995–96 academic year

School name	APs offered	Cost £000s	Percentage of APs
Hulme Grammar, Girls, Oldham	220	533	29.91
Hurstpierpoint College, Hassocks	28	195	7.92
Hymers College, Hull	199	417	16.97
Ipswich High School GPDST	178	299	17.68
Ispwich School	80	301	10.35
James Allen's Girls School	180	708	15.71
John Lyon School, Harrow	118	433	21.36
Kent College, Canterbury	88	396	17.31
Kimbolton School, Cambridge	41	165	5.62
King Edward VI High School, Birmingham	185	396	25.87
King Edward VI School, Southampton	245	737	23.92
King Edward VII School, Lytham	244	576	47.05
King Edward's School at Bath	113	320	12.65
King Edward's School, Birmingham	300	783	28.12
King Edward's School, Witley	88	330	12.98
King's College School, Wimbledon	60	222	3.82
King's High School for Girls, Warwick	210	340	24.96
King's School, Bruton	31	186	9.06
King's School, Chester	122	234	14.80
King's School, Macclesfield	216	670	14.87
King's School, Rochester	66	283	9.68
King's School, Tynemouth	38	118	4.24
King's School, Worcester	203	731	18.52
Kingsley School	30	88	4.69
Kingston Grammar School	179	631	28.24
Kingswood School, Bath	47	181	9.67
Kirkham Grammar School	80	247	10.93
La Sagesse Convent School, Newcastle	181	536	35.08
Lady Eleanor Holles School, Hampton	85	170	5.48
Latymer Upper School, London W6	339	836	22.47
Laxton School	35	20	4.02
Leeds Girls High School	118	257	8.80
Leeds Grammar School	240	579	15.68
Leicester Grammar School	53	172	8.91
Leighton Park School, Reading	29	194	7.65
Leys School, Cambridge	37	266	9.29
Liverpool College	195	775	19.65
Lord Wandsworth College, Basingstoke	81	492	17.12
Loreto Convent Grammar School, Altrincham	96	95	4.76
Loughborough Grammar	130	345	13.27
Loughborough High School	104	231	17.77
Magdalen College School, Oxford	145	375	24.37
Malvern College	113	725	13.49
Manchester Grammar School	290	816	18.57
Manchester High School	185	566	19.71
Marist Convent Senior School, Ascot	35	80	6.65
Maynard School, Exeter	185	573	31.92
Merchant Taylors' Girls, Liverpool	206	623	22.50
Merchant Taylors', Liverpool	231	691	26.65
Merchant Taylors' Northwood	100	406	11.46
Mill Hill School	88	412	14.45
Monkton Combe School, Bath	41	268	12.81

Assisted places scheme 1995–96 academic year

School name	APs offered	Cost £000s	Percentage of APs
Mount Carmel School, Cheshire	35	109	6.38
Mount School, York	35	180	10.90
Mount St. Mary's College, Near Sheffield	71	309	24.57
Newcastle Under Lyme School, Staffordshire	474	964	30.05
Newcastle Upon Tyne Church High School	35	78	5.24
North London Collegiate School, Edgware	100	304	9.23
Northampton High School	208	564	19.11
Norwich High School GPDST	220	461	19.60
Norwich School	118	351	13.59
Notting Hill and Ealing High GPDST	136	344	14.66
Nottingham Girls High School GPDST	220	529	17.91
Nottingham High School	185	498	21.01
Oakham School, Rutland	33	160	3.25
Old Palace School, Croydon	255	682	28.30
Oxford High School GPDST	144	130	8.55
Pangbourne College, Reading	30	202	8.29
Perse School for Boys, Cambridge	66	128	6.17
Perse School for Girls	114	252	11.94
Plymouth College	226	810	22.83
Pocklington School, near York	160	615	21.36
Polam Hall School, Darlington	59	148	11.32
Portsmouth Grammar School	221	492	14.95
Portsmouth High School GPDST	175	337	18.54
Prior Park College, Bath	33	116	6.19
Putney High School GPDST	148	290	11.89
Queen Elizabeth Grammar, Blackburn	275	848	25.05
Queen Elizabeth Grammar, Wakefield	177	420	19.15
Queen Elizabeth Hospital School, Bristol	185	614	33.97
Queen Mary School, Lytham	269	607	33.43
Queen's College Taunton	70	312	9.38
Queen's College, London W1	80	381	21.31
Queen's School, Chester	81	152	9.15
Ratcliffe College, Leicestershire	82	362	16.29
Red Maids' College, Bristol	185	584	30.72
Redland High School, Bristol	102	342	15.96
Reed's School, Cobham	32	198	9.40
Reigate Grammar School	115	361	12.59
Rendcomb College, Cirencester	35	196	14.16
Repton School near Derby	63	429	11.62
Rossall School, Fleetwood	50	223	7.24
Royal Grammar School, Guildford	145	493	14.34
Royal Grammar School, Newcastle	375	480	20.28
Royal Grammar School, Worcester	298	914	29.09
Ryde School	24	99	3.65
Salesian College, Farnborough	130	173	17.02
Scarborough College	44	181	11.80
Sedbergh School	34	286	9.88
Sevenoaks School, Kent	41	153	3.30
Sheffield High School, GPDST	122	280	12.44
Shrewsbury High School GPDST	102	255	15.22

Assisted places scheme 1995–96 academic year

School name	APs offered	Cost £000s	Percentage of APs
Silcoates School	18	82	3.02
Sir William Perkins's School, Chertsey	115	205	14.33
Solihull School	45	103	4.32
South Hampstead High School GPDST	80	245	8.19
St. Albans High School for Girls	80	172	7.98
St. Albans School	150	479	21.22
St. Ambrose College, Altrincham	109	136	6.20
St. Bede's College, Manchester	220	770	18.18
St. Bees School, Cumbria	77	438	25.77
St. Benedict's School, Ealing	81	309	13.13
St. Catherine's School, Bramley	62	137	4.91
St. Dunstan's College, Catford	185	646	19.35
St. Edmund's College, Ware	80	383	15.27
St. Edward's College, Liverpool	396	1,237	35.70
St. Felix School, Southwold	36	180	16.83
St. George's College, Weybridge	40	216	7.50
St. Helen and St. Katherine, Abingdon	114	198	15.19
St. Helen's School, Northwood	53	189	5.42
St. John's College, Southsea	202	603	28.43
St. John's School, Leatherhead	22	111	5.32
St. Joseph's College, Ipswich	81	294	11.48
St. Joseph's College, Stoke-on Trent	30	94	6.29
St. Joseph's Convent, Reading	150	470	38.18
St. Lawrence College, Ramsgate	36	209	9.84
St. Margaret's School, Bushey	31	134	7.49
St. Margaret's School, Exeter	36	128	8.43
St. Mary and St. Anne	32	183	10.88
St. Mary's College, Crosby	283	859	30.60
St. Mary's Hall, Brighton	73	387	17.68
St. Mary's School, Cambridge	145	333	21.36
St. Maurs Convent, Weybridge	79	237	11.39
St. Paul's Girls School, Hammersmith	80	312	11.57
St. Paul's School, Barnes	99	455	6.54
St. Peter's School, York	149	480	14.23
St. Swithun's School, Winchester	6	19	0.46
Stafford Independent Grammar School	30	97	10.10
Stamford High School	114	336	12.00
Stamford School	110	208	9.72
Stockport Grammar School	290	687	20.47

Assisted places scheme 1995–96 academic year

School name	APs offered	Cost £000s	Percentage of APs
Stonyhurst College, near Blackburn	38	215	9.51
Stowe School, near Buckingham	6	48	1.10
Streatham Hill and Clapham High GPDST	178	518	24.62
Surbiton High School	35	120	3.74
Sutton High School GPDST	92	212	9.33
Sutton Valence School, near Maidstone	78	428	26.71
Sydenham High School GPDST	136	428	19.35
Talbot Heath School, Bournemouth	179	525	24.47
Taunton School	52	312	5.62
Teesside High School	30	73	4.55
Tonbridge School	6	29	0.74
Tormead School, Guildford	35	104	4.50
Trent College, Derbyshire	136	608	19.57
Trinity School of John Whitgift, Croydon	150	549	17.49
Truro High School	80	273	18.68
Truro School	120	481	15.27
University College School, London NW3	80	348	8.44
Ursuline Convent School, Kent	35	147	8.56
Ursuline High School, Ilford	150	489	39.89
Wakefield High School	160	390	13.66
Walthamstow Hall, Sevenoaks	88	207	10.20
Warwick School	170	464	14.12
Wellingborough School	70	277	8.58
Wellington College, Berkshire	44	263	5.08
Wellington School, Somerset	241	812	30.21
Wells Cathedral School	78	322	9.81
West Buckland School, Barnstaple	85	368	15.22
Westholme School, Blackburn	37	125	3.66
Westminster School	64	362	9.24
Whitgift School, Croydon	114	459	10.27
William Hulme Grammar School	220	747	28.57
Wimbledon High School GPDST	80	227	8.98
Winchester College	25	142	3.13
Wisbech Grammar School	339	1,287	52.46
Withington Girls School, Manchester	111	217	14.31
Wolverhampton Grammar School	314	947	37.50
Woodbridge School, Suffolk	127	592	25.10
Woodhouse Grove School, Bradford	149	476	16.90
Worksop College, Nottingham	27	131	8.04
Wrekin College	15	75	5.81
Wycliffe College, Stonehouse	43	309	6.39
Yarm School	53	203	10.79

Attendance Database (Bolton)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will disseminate nationally as a model of good practice the pupil attendance database established by Bolton education authority; and if she will make a statement on *(a)* the correlation between the database and the child benefit register and *(b)* access by the local education authority to information concerning families claiming housing benefit. [15644]

Mr. Robin Squire: Following a series of contacts with the local authority associations and other interested parties on issues raised by the West case, the Department has issued a consultative letter on tightening up procedures governing the transfer of pupil records and reports. My right hon. Friend will consider whether there is a case for disseminating any particular model of database, or any other example of good practice, in the light of the outcomes of that consultation.

Special Needs

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what were *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of children with statements of special need (i) in each local education authority area in England and (ii) in total, in each year since 1992. [15481]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is shown in the table and is taken from the Department's statistical bulletin 12/97.

Pupils with statements by local education authority area in England: 1991 to 1993, January each year

	1991			*1992*			*1993*		
	Total pupils	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*
Corporation of London	1,766	2	0.1	1,773	2	0.1	1,795	5	0.3
Camden	25,475	480	1.9	26,649	525	2.0	27,541	609	2.2
Greenwich	37,411	1,069	2.9	38,085	1,092	2.9	38,182	1,122	2.9
Hackney	27,411	887	3.2	28,194	866	3.1	28,246	898	3.2
Hammersmith	19,181	583	3.0	19,352	554	2.9	19,601	573	2.9
Islington	22,688	559	2.5	23,537	598	2.5	23,295	639	2.7
Kensington and Chelsea	20,136	151	0.7	29,387	188	0.9	20,365	207	1.0
Lambeth	27,534	1,107	4.0	27,885	930	3.3	28,366	856	3.0
Lewisham	34,047	640	1.9	34,697	667	1.9	35,046	827	2.4
Southwark	34,630	633	1.8	35,750	680	1.9	36,788	730	2.0
Tower Hamlets	31,194	546	1.8	32,286	612	1.9	33,841	753	2.2
Wandsworth	30,379	1,097	3.6	31,217	968	3.1	32,304	1,094	3.4
Westminster	21,836	219	1.0	22,185	340	1.5	22,616	336	1.5
Barking	23,673	304	1.3	24,695	333	1.3	25,373	358	1.4
Barnet	47,418	550	1.2	48,411	557	1.2	48,850	666	1.4
Bexley	32,920	569	1.7	33,583	671	2.0	34,112	743	2.2
Brent	34,150	400	1.2	35,266	435	1.2	37,168	580	1.6
Bromley	40,735	775	1.9	41,574	783	1.9	43,202	876	2.0
Croydon	48,228	846	1.8	49,335	854	1.7	50,660	799	1.6
Ealing	45,108	670	1.5	45,615	745	1.6	45,378	919	2.0
Enfield	39,867	257	0.6	40,969	191	0.5	42,479	278	0.7
Haringey	29,297	243	0.8	30,359	346	1.1	31,106	451	1.4
Harrow	31,131	397	1.3	31,445	458	1.5	31,983	518	1.6
Havering	35,864	490	1.4	35,349	591	1.7	35,353	617	1.7
Hillingdon	36,103	552	1.5	36,625	542	1.5	37,753	532	1.4
Hounslow	33,215	999	3.0	33,787	964	2.9	34,493	1,023	3.0
Kingston upon Thames	20,793	348	1.7	21,129	405	1.9	21,623	407	1.9
Merton	24,486	403	1.6	25,197	448	1.8	25,980	491	1.9
Newham	38,303	688	1.8	39,095	705	1.8	40,266	729	1.8
Redbridge	35,249	288	0.8	36,557	481	1.3	38,043	540	1.4
Richmond upon Thames	23,933	346	1.4	24,326	386	1.6	25,040	443	1.8
Sutton	24,988	533	2.1	25,597	580	2.3	26,232	584	2.2
Waltham Forest	31,972	659	2.1	32,505	827	2.5	33,357	851	2.6
Birmingham	177,519	3,098	1.7	179,886	3,125	1.7	182,760	3,608	2.0
Coventry	50,777	934	1.8	51,459	930	1.8	52,194	988	1.9
Dudley	45,369	840	1.9	45,707	805	1.8	46,472	845	1.8
Sandwell	49,757	735	1.5	50,548	731	1.4	51,203	697	1.4

Pupils with statements by local education authority area in England: 1991 to 1993, January each year

	1991			1992			1993		
	Total pupils	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*
Solihull	34,475	509	1.5	35,359	607	1.7	36,329	643	1.8
Walsall	47,751	807	1.7	48,443	895	1.8	49,300	1,039	2.1
Wolverhampton	42,885	811	1.9	43,169	853	2.0	44,517	991	2.2
Knowsley	27,885	704	2.5	771	28,213	2.7	848	28,566	3.0
Liverpool	83,463	1,777	2.1	1,817	84,471	2.2	2,073	85,654	2.4
St. Helens	30,327	744	2.5	776	30,282	2.6	965	30,364	3.2
Sefton	49,475	1,093	2.2	1,110	49,859	2.2	1,195	50,388	2.4
Wirral	56,863	1,177	2.1	1,255	57,386	2.2	1,482	58,175	2.5
Bolton	46,458	677	1.5	642	46,825	1.4	811	47,480	1.7
Bury	28,777	720	2.5	796	29,182	2.7	892	29,854	3.0
Manchester	74,651	969	1.3	75,588	815	1.1	76,543	1,071	1.4
Oldham	41,687	793	1.9	42,416	897	2.1	42,913	869	2.0
Rochdale	35,451	787	2.2	35,454	621	1.8	35,977	751	2,1
Salford	36,879	377	1.0	37,211	485	1.3	37,883	477	1.3
Stockport	45,908	1,264	2.8	46,790	1,427	3.0	47,414	1,462	3.1
Tameside	35,403	692	2.0	35,959	778	2.2	36,722	976	2.7
Trafford	34,026	700	2.1	34,926	673	1.9	35,665	698	2.0
Wigan	49,508	1,252	2.5	49,506	885	1.8	49,944	1,465	2.9

Pupils with statements by local education authority area in England: 1994 to 1996, January each year

	1994			1995			1996		
	Total pupils	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*
Corporation of London	1,833	2	0.1	1,839	0	0.0	1,827	2	0.1
Camden	27,996	684	2.4	28,535	837	2.9	29,127	955	3.3
Greenwich	38,267	1,157	3.0	38,454	1,369	3.6	39,021	1,391	3.6
Hackney	28,414	881	3.1	29,818	877	2.9	29,841	865	2.9
Hammersmith	19,692	581	3.0	20,136	662	3.3	19,965	703	3.5
Islington	24,051	752	3.1	24,832	827	3.3	25,183	887	3.5
Kensington and Chelsea	20,455	202	1.0	20,619	242	1.2	21,028	258	1.2
Lambeth	28,283	818	2.9	28,633	848	3.0	28,782	835	2.9
Lewisham	35,623	919	26	36,265	1,050	2.9	36,270	1,090	3.0
Southwark	38,533	785	2.0	38,766	929	2.4	38,888	1,029	2.6
Tower Hamlets	35,086	901	2.6	35,974	1,089	3.0	36,712	1,252	3.4
Wandsworth	33,050	1,148	3.5	33,941	1,220	3.6	35,037	1,288	3.7
Westminster	22,850	289	1.3	23,075	373	1.6	23,036	403	1.7
Barking	26,030	445	1.7	27,382	559	2.0	27,817	630	2.3
Barnet	49,514	748	1.5	50,722	915	1.8	51,193	972	1.9
Bexley	35,060	787	2.2	36,700	858	2.3	37,709	857	2.3
Brent	37,744	685	1.8	38,388	736	1.9	38,752	892	2.3
Bromley	45,256	1,029	2.3	46,504	1,221	2.6	47,589	1,426	3.0
Croydon	51,859	818	1.6	53,711	864	1.6	54,940	905	1.6
Ealing	45,567	1,034	2.5	46,642	755	1.6	47,841	876	1.8
Enfield	43,419	382	0.9	44,555	666	1.5	45,903	904	2.0
Haringey	32,043	539	1.7	33,312	627	1.9	34,406	821	2.4
Harrow	32,592	649	2.0	32,900	643	2.0	33,255	810	2.4
Havering	35,935	729	2.0	36,330	810	2.2	36,421	971	2.7
Hillingdon	38,578	888	2.3	39,672	1,135	2.9	40,781	1,207	3.0
Hounslow	35,220	1,034	2.9	35,801	1,012	2.8	36,188	1,007	2.8
Kingston upon Thames	22,205	473	2.1	22,641	507	2.2	23,100	551	2.4
Merton	26,619	573	2.2	27,000	551	2.0	27,512	708	2.6
Newham	41,028	381	2.0	43,588	990	2.3	44,625	1,121	2.5
Redbridge	39,140	617	1.6	39,554	676	1.7	40,978	718	1.8
Richmond upon Thames	25,663	434	1.7	26,121	497	1.9	26,778	482	1.8
Sutton	27,040	662	2.4	27,806	694	2.5	28,460	763	2.7
Waltham Forest	34,218	862	2.5	34,990	986	2.8	35,859	1,117	3.1
Birmingham	184,475	3,954	2.1	186,688	4,327	2.3	189,079	4,475	2.4
Coventry	52,680	1,049	2.0	53,180	1,084	2.0	53,453	1,152	2.2
Dudley	48,735	863	1.8	49,475	923	1.9	50,313	971	1.9
Sandwell	51,927	710	1.4	52,869	814	1.5	53,244	961	1.8
Solihull	37,119	693	1.9	38,268	746	1.9	39,145	775	2.0
Walsall	49,932	1,122	2.2	50,357	1,294	2.6	50,637	1,369	2.7
Wolverhampton	44,826	1,034	2.3	45,245	1,095	2.4	45,477	1,089	2.4
Knowsley	837	28,723	2.9	910	30,225	3.0	30,281	963	3.2
Liverpool	2,276	87,701	2.6	2,512	87,081	2.9	87,467	2,494	2.9

Pupils with statements by local education authority area in England: 1994 to 1996, January each year

	1994			1995			1996		
	Total pupils	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*
St. Helens	1,211	30,601	4.0	1,430	30,786	4.6	30,933	1,399	4.5
Sefton	1,384	51,020	2.7	1,468	51,960	2.8	52,279	1,495	2.9
Wirral	1,487	58,859	2.5	1,570	59,244	2.7	59,599	1,808	3.0
Bolton	899	48,334	1.9	1,054	49,081	2.1	49,768	1,234	2.5
Bury	967	30,557	3.2	1,042	31,188	3.3	31,882	1,041	3.3
Manchester	76,854	1,156	1.5	77,449	1,523	2.0	77,328	1,798	2.3
Oldham	43,513	615	1.4	43,941	607	1.4	44,198	628	1.4
Rochdale	36,542	759	2.1	36,958	876	2.4	37,420	832	2.2
Salford	38,550	666	1.7	39,602	723	1.8	40,006	668	1.7
Stockport	48,201	1,545	3.2	48,917	1,536	3.1	48,550	1,464	3.0
Tameside	37,600	949	2.5	38,308	1,034	2.7	38,803	1,048	2.7
Trafford	36,701	716	2.0	37,662	742	2.0	38,663	795	2.1
Wigan	50,621	1,719	3.4	51,015	1,933	3.8	51,321	2,112	4.1

Pupils with statements by local education authority area in England: 1991 to 1993, January each year

	1991			1992			1993		
	Total pupils	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*
Barnsley	33,700	432	1.3	33,752	491	1.5	34,221	632	1.8
Doncaster	50,812	1,122	2.2	51,675	1,198	2.3	52,278	1,298	2.5
Rotherham	42,518	909	2.1	42,848	1,095	2.6	43,587	1,172	2.7
Sheffield	72,638	1,384	1.9	73,447	1,473	2.0	74,487	1,503	2.0
Bradford	88,304	1,155	1.3	89,861	1,123	1.2	92,063	1,317	1.4
Calderdale	33,261	454	1.4	33,679	456	1.4	34,345	506	1.5
Kirklees	63,122	1,347	2.1	63,628	1,455	2.3	64,240	1,583	2.5
Leeds	111,961	2,837	2.5	113,725	2,861	2.5	115,990	2,997	2.6
Wakefield	53,083	751	1.4	53,687	848	1.6	54,520	806	1.5
Gateshead	30,972	439	1.4	31,225	452	1.4	31,711	440	1.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	45,610	1,081	2.4	46,011	1,136	2.5	46,367	1,097	2.4
North Tyneside	31,963	806	2.5	32,257	893	2.8	32,620	954	2.9
South Tyneside	25,280	485	1.9	25,682	553	2.2	26,125	564	2.2
Sunderland	50,765	994	2.0	51,122	1,080	2.1	51,762	1,194	2.3
Isles of Scilly	285	0	0.0	285	0	0.0	282	1	0.4
Avon	146,887	3,188	2.2	149,357	3,253	2.2	151,664	3,559	2.3
Bedfordshire	91,734	1,656	1.8	93,252	1,777	1.9	95,048	2,100	2.2
Berkshire	126,551	2,430	1.9	127,448	2,897	2.3	128,493	3,190	2.5
Buckinghamshire	105,522	2,901	2.7	106,681	2,969	2.8	108,659	3,371	3.1
Cambridgeshire	104,505	1,821	1.7	106,076	1,751	1.7	107,607	1,893	1.8
Cheshire	159,960	3,815	2.4	160,405	3,969	2.5	162,217	4,215	2.6
Cleveland	102,308	2,239	2.2	103,767	2,181	2.1	104,718	2,278	2.2
Cornwall	70,717	1,887	2.7	71,254	2,076	2.9	72,407	2,463	3.4
Cumbria	76,692	1,866	2.4	77,123	2,038	2.6	77,872	2,592	3.3
Derbyshire	147,040	3,972	2.7	147,790	3,758	2.5	149,862	4,429	3.0
Devon	147,151	4,686	3.2	148,708	5,116	3.4	151,459	5,037	3.3
Dorset	92,913	1,898	2.0	93,682	2,029	2.2	95,282	2,203	2.3
Durham	96,845	1,576	1.6	98,148	1,782	1.8	99,214	2,070	2.1
East Sussex	94,797	2,292	2.4	96,091	2,358	2.5	98,284	2,696	2.7
Essex	228,740	4,432	1.9	229,755	4,234	1.8	231,780	4,623	2.0
Gloucestershire	83,136	1,234	1.5	83,643	1,558	1.9	85,011	1,814	2.1
Hampshire	224,906	5,947	2.6	226,686	6,072	2.7	230,973	6,810	2.9
Hereford and Worcester	106,503	1,374	1.3	107,057	1,430	1.3	107,726	1,977	1.8
Hertfordshire	167,789	3,474	2.1	169,753	3,639	2.1	172,273	3,963	2.3
Humberside	141,629	2,010	1.4	143,028	2,206	1.5	145,645	2,450	1.7
Isle of Wight	18,759	382	2.0	18,800	391	2.1	19,005	409	2.2
Kent	243,963	5,045	2.1	247,446	5,533	2.2	251,214	5,975	2.4
Lancashire	223,285	5,208	2.3	224,843	5,779	2.6	227,866	6,460	2.8
Leicestershire	144,845	2,305	1.6	146,193	2,634	1.8	148,013	2,973	2.0
Lincolnshire	88,905	2,123	2.4	2,323	89,967	2.6	2,567	91,813	2.8
Norfolk	107,913	2,786	2.6	108,875	2,818	2.6	110,573	3,121	2.8
North Yorkshire	108,553	2,156	2.0	109,866	2,222	2.0	112,214	2,356	2.1
Northamptonshire	100,293	1,656	1.7	101,669	1,737	1.7	103,060	1,817	1.8
Northumberland	50,315	946	1.9	51,228	977	1.9	52,155	1,093	2.1
Nottinghamshire	159,394	2,192	1.4	160,785	2,051	1.3	163,363	1,988	1.2
Oxfordshire	87,580	974	1.1	88,403	1,074	1.2	89,774	1,294	1.4
Shropshire	65,741	1,906	2.9	65,656	2,099	3.2	67,169	2,187	3.3

Pupils with statements by local education authority area in England: 1991 to 1993, January each year

	1991			1992			1993		
	Total pupils	Pupils with statements	Percentage	Total pupils	Pupils with statements	Percentage	Total pupils	Pupils with statements	Percentage
Somerset	71,507	1,541	2.2	72,253	1,597	2.2	73,260	1,751	2.4
Staffordshire	165,583	3,078	1.9	167,633	3,043	1.8	170,542	3,751	2.2
Suffolk	98,480	2,416	2.5	99,680	2,819	2.8	100,542	3,069	3.1
Surrey	152,032	4,130	2.7	152,303	4,414	2.9	153,063	4,705	3.1
Warwickshire	77,507	1,478	1.9	78,020	1,430	1.8	79,107	1,609	2.0
West Sussex	100,917	1,526	1.5	102,568	1,629	1.6	104,485	2,069	2.0
Wiltshire	84,017	2,736	3.3	85,328	2,964	3.5	87,914	3,138	3.6
England	7,536,603	153,228	2.0	7,626,159	160,759	2.1	7,748,678	178,029	2.3

Pupils with statements by local education authority in England: 1994 to 1996, January each year

	1994			1995			1996		
	Total pupils	Pupils with statements	Percentage	Total pupils	Pupils with statements	Percentage	Total pupils	Pupils with statements	Percentage
Barnsley	34,639	786	2.3	35,096	996	2.8	35,313	1,054	3.0
Doncaster	52,987	1,507	2.8	53,620	1,931	3.6	53,806	2,470	4.6
Rotherham	44,425	1,284	2.9	45,375	1,374	3.0	45,998	1,463	3.2
Sheffield	75,538	1,635	2.2	76,604	1,761	2.3	77,529	1,848	2.4
Bradford	93,499	1,577	1.7	94,595	1,639	1.7	94,884	2,076	2.2
Calderdale	34,734	591	1.7	35,383	679	1.9	35,726	821	2.3
Kirklees	65,795	1,952	3.0	66,532	2,113	3.2	66,928	2,244	3.4
Leeds	119,443	3,295	2.8	121,193	3,510	2.9	121,807	3,896	3.2
Wakefield	55,456	1,117	2.0	56,730	1,244	2.2	57,304	1,458	2.5
Gateshead	32,033	511	1.6	32,378	588	1.8	32,695	653	2.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	46,507	1,241	2.7	46,901	1,259	2.7	46,843	1,260	2.7
North Tyneside	32,814	994	3.0	33,309	1,035	3.1	33,294	1,015	3.0
South Tyneside	26,455	569	2.2	26,980	656	2.4	27,084	713	2.6
Sunderland	52,442	1,327	2.5	52,511	1,561	3.0	52,657	1,785	3.4
Isles of Scilly	291	0	0.0	283	4	1.4	265	4	1.5
Aaron	153,705	3,805	2.5	155,145	4,341	2.8	156,555	4,817	3.1
Bedfordshire	97,196	2,513	2.6	98,333	2,425	2.5	99,269	2,736	2.8
Berkshire	130,925	3,371	2.6	132,885	3,591	2.7	134,615	3,849	2.9
Buckinghamshire	110,372	3,592	3.3	112,555	3,336	3.0	114,247	3,703	3.2
Cambridgeshire	109,051	2,273	2.1	110,671	2,718	2.5	111,848	3,060	2.7
Cheshire	164,329	4,630	2.8	166,375	5,140	3.1	167,965	5,354	3.2
Cleveland	105,780	2,360	2.2	106,710	2,524	2.4	107,342	2,744	2.6
Cornwall	72,718	2,759	3.8	73,548	2,908	4.0	74,256	3,113	4.2
Cumbria	78,464	3,070	3.9	79,292	3,205	4.0	80,636	3,222	4.0
Derbyshire	151,995	4,810	3.2	154,152	5,251	3.4	156,541	5,360	3.4
Devon	153,703	5,317	3.5	156,946	5,338	3.4	158,983	5,497	3.5
Dorset	97,002	2,419	2.5	98,982	2,470	2.5	100,601	2,477	2.5
Durham	100,307	2,486	2.5	101,089	2,942	2.9	101,447	3,264	3.2
East Sussex	100,729	3,106	3.1	102,771	3,534	3.4	104,728	3,619	3.5
Essex	235,028	5,208	2.2	240,015	5,492	2.3	244,362	5,536	2.3
Gloucestershire	86,389	2,157	2.5	88,238	2,282	2.6	89,539	2,481	2.8
Hampshire	241,202	7,374	3.1	244,391	7,739	3.2	247,911	7,454	3.0
Hereford and Worcester	109,605	2,121	1.9	111,176	2,608	2.3	111,720	3,110	2.8
Hertfordshire	175,448	4,231	2.4	179,547	4,599	2.6	183,009	4,881	2.7
Humberside	147,616	2,719	1.8	149,402	3,222	2.2	151,089	3,352	2.2
Isle of Wight	19,173	313	1.6	19,415	487	2.5	19,581	594	3.0
Kent	255,085	6,513	2.6	259,604	7,256	2.8	262,785	7,844	3.0
Lancashire	231,773	7,183	3.1	235,187	7,815	3.3	237,413	8,472	3.6
Leicestershire	150,601	3,274	2.2	152,673	3,683	2.4	154,219	4,291	2.8
Lincolnshire	2,820	93,475	3.0	3,048	95,993	3.2	97,785	3,180	3.3
Norfolk	111,581	3,589	3.2	113,356	3,759	3.3	114,012	4,368	3.8
North Yorkshire	113,893	2,508	2.2	116,138	2,616	2.3	117,701	2,787	2.4
Northamptonshire	104,885	2,117	2.0	106,641	2,316	2.2	108,468	2,561	2.4
Northumberland	52,469	1,211	2.3	52,820	1,155	2.2	53,001	1,416	2.7
Nottinghamshire	166,054	1,896	1.1	168,405	1,932	1.1	170,543	2,011	1.2
Oxfordshire	91,819	1,646	1.8	94,184	1,875	2.0	95,946	2,157	2.2
Shropshire	68,547	2,288	3.3	69,875	2,449	3.5	70,881	2,662	3.8
Somerset	74,611	1,876	2.5	75,761	1,974	2.6	76,605	2,234	2.9
Staffordshire	172,827	3,806	2.2	175,101	4,543	2.6	177,041	4,864	2.7
Suffolk	101,885	3,149	3.1	103,934	3,049	2.9	104,967	3,473	3.3
Surrey	156,433	4,669	3.0	162,758	5,074	3.1	166,114	5,156	3.1
Warwickshire	80,023	1,773	2.2	81,038	1,771	2.2	81,933	2,006	2.4

Pupils with statements by local education authority in England: 1994 to 1996, January each year

	1994			1995			1996		
	Total pupils	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*	*Total pupils*	*Pupils with statements*	*Percentage*
West Sussex	106,535	2,409	2.3	108,797	2,598	2.4	110,297	3,129	2.8
Wiltshire	89,610	2,845	3.2	91,732	2,624	2.9	93,774	2,463	2.6
England	7,882,835	194,541	2.5	8,017,830	211,307	2.6	8,116,532	227,324	2.8

1. Figures are taken from schools' returns under the annual schools census. They include all nursery, primary, middle, secondary and special schools, city technology colleges and pupil referral units; including maintained, grant-maintained, non-maintained and independent schools.
2. The table shows numbers and percentages of pupils educated in schools in each LEA area. For any particular LEA, this will include pupils with statements placed by other LEAs, and exclude such pupils placed by the LEA in other areas.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many appeal hearings have been considered by the special educational needs tribunal *(a)* in respect of each local education authority in England and *(b)* in total, in each year since the tribunal began operating. [15480]

Mrs. Gillan: The tribunal maintains records of the number of appeals registered—and decisions issued—rather than the number of appeal hearings.

The number of appeals registered for individual LEAs is set out in the table: 1,092 appeals against decisions by English LEAs were registered in 1994–95 and 1,551 in 1995–96. Some 40 per cent. of all appeals registered to date have been withdrawn before a hearing.

Appeals registered from 1 September 1994 to 31 August 1996

	1994–95 Number of appeals	*1995–96 Number of appeals*
Avon[1]	18	38
Barking and Dagenham	1	5
Barnet	23	25
Barnsley	2	4
Bedfordshire	20	29
Berkshire	20	27
Bexley	15	20
Birmingham	8	5
Bolton	4	3
Bradford	3	17
Brent	7	13
Bromley	1	7
Buckinghamshire	6	15
Bury	5	11
Calderdale	4	3
Cambridge	6	20
Camden	7	25
Cheshire	40	34
City of London	0	0
Cleveland[1]	0	1
Cornwall	5	13
Coventry	2	1
Croydon	5	6
Cumbria	30	37
Derbyshire	4	5
Devon	13	19
Doncaster	7	5
Dorset	22	18
Dudley	13	14
Durham	0	8
Ealing	22	37
East Sussex	51	61
Enfield	7	6
Essex	44	72
Gateshead	0	1
Gloucestershire	18	10
Greenwich	12	20
Hackney	5	8

Appeals registered from 1 September 1994 to 31 August 1996

	1994–95 Number of appeals	*1995–96 Number of appeals*
Hammersmith and Fulham	3	9
Hampshire	62	52
Haringey	10	10
Harrow	12	6
Havering	2	12
Hereford and Worcester	5	26
Hertfordshire	20	34
Hillingdon	7	3
Hounslow	6	7
Humberside[1]	58	53
Isle of Wight	0	3
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Islington	6	6
Kensington and Chelsea	4	5
Kent	38	56
Kingston upon Thames	3	13
Kirklees	5	8
Knowsley	1	0
Lambeth	6	10
Lancashire	15	20
Leeds	9	22
Leicestershire	6	26
Lewisham	5	25
Lincolnshire	8	19
Liverpool	7	14
Manchester	6	20
Merton	23	13
Newcastle upon Tyne	3	7
Newham	9	12
Norfolk	18	16
North Tyneside	4	9
North Yorkshire[1]	10	11
Northamptonshire	11	12
Northumberland	2	1
Nottinghamshire	11	23
Oldham	1	0
Oxfordshire	7	8
Redbridge	14	13
Richmond upon Thames	12	14
Rochdale	0	9
Rotherham	3	3
Salford	1	2
Sandwell	0	4
Sefton	13	11
Sheffield	4	12
Shropshire	3	6
Solihull	7	14
Somerset	7	18
South Tyneside	1	0
Southwark	7	4
St. Helens	1	4
Staffordshire	23	25
Stockport	6	3
Suffolk	15	20
Sunderland	4	6
Surrey	25	38
Sutton	0	4

Appeals registered from 1 September 1994 to 31 August 1996

	1994–95 Number of appeals	*1995–96 Number of appeals*
Tameside	1	2
Tower Hamlets	0	0
Trafford	3	4
Wakefield	4	10
Walsall	5	7
Waltham Forest	6	9
Wandsworth	23	17
Warwickshire	10	13
West Sussex	22	33
Westminster	3	4
Wigan	2	0
Wiltshire	3	8
Wirral	10	18
Wolverhampton	1	2

[1] These figures include appeals registered against the new authorities created on 1 April 1996.

Employment Directions (EU)

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the directions relating to employment in force in the EU and indicate which are issued under the social chapter. [15990]

Mr. Paice: Fourteen directives relating to employment are currently in force in the EU. There are a number of other directives on health and safety at work.

Directives falling within the policy responsibilities of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment:

Council directive 75/117/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women.

Council directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions.

Council directive 86/613/EEC on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood.

Directives falling within the policy responsibility of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade:

Council directive 75/129/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to collective redundancies.

Council directive 77/187/EEC on the approximation of the laws of member states relating to the safeguarding of employees' rights in the event of transfers of undertakings, businesses or parts of businesses.

Council directive 80/987/EEC on the approximation of the laws of member states relating to the protection of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer.

Council directive 91/533/EEC on an employer's obligation to inform employees of the conditions applicable to the contract or employment relationship.

Council directive 92/56/EEC amending directive 75/129/EEC on the approximation of the laws of member states relating to collective redundancies.

Council directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage the safety and health of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding—this directive includes provisions related to employment.

Council directive 94/104/EC concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time.

Council directive 94/33/EC on the protection of young people at work.

*Council directive 94/45/EC on the establishment of a European works council or a procedure in community-scale undertakings and community-scale groups of undertakings, for the purposes of informing and consulting employees.

*Council directive 96/34/EC on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC.

Council directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services.

Directives marked with an asterisk have been promulgated under the agreement on social policy, known as the social chapter, and are not, therefore, applicable to the UK.

Jobmatch Scheme

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the estimated annual cost of the national jobmatch scheme for under-25-year-olds. [15800]

Mr. Forth: In 1997–98, the jobmatch scheme will offer 4,000 opportunities at a cost of some £4.8 million

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of *(a)* the costs and *(b)* the numbers gaining if the jobmatch scheme for under-25-year-olds was available to those (i) unemployed for one year and (ii) unemployed for 26 weeks; and what is her estimate of the cost of reinstating bonus payments after 26 weeks in work. [15801]

Mr. Forth: To extend the availability of the jobmatch scheme to people under 25 who have been unemployed for one year would require some 10,000 opportunities at a cost of about £12 million; to extend it to those unemployed for 26 weeks would require up to 19,000 opportunities at a cost of some £23 million. To reinstate the additional payments in 1997–98 for young people unemployed for two years would cost about £300,000.

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if Employment Service advisers will be authorised to issue a jobseeker's direction to a claimant aged 18 to 24 years directing him to apply for a part-time vacancy under the jobmatch scheme. [16124]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Terry Rooney, dated 17 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about whether Employment Service Advisers have the authority to issue Jobseeker's Directions to 18 to 24 year old jobseekers for a part-time vacancy under Jobmatch. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

It may be helpful if I explain that the purpose of a Jobseeker's Direction is to make sure that jobseekers who may not be properly or effectively looking for work undertake a specific job search activity which will put them in a better position to find a job. A Jobseeker's Direction can fall into one of four categories:— those which underpin active jobsearch; referral to Employment Service (ES) programmes; other referrals to non ES programmes (eg Training for Work); and a personal direction related to behaviour/appearance. A Direction will only be given if the jobseeker has gone through the usual advisory interview process,

and has not been influenced or persuaded to undertake a particular activity which is reasonable and will improve their chances of finding work.

It follows that an ES adviser would be able to issue a Jobseeker's Direction to a jobseeker aged 18–24, who has been employed for two years or more to apply for a part-time vacancy, which would qualify them for Jobmatch.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many unemployed people receiving the jobseeker's allowance are involved in self-build schemes; how many have been refused the jobseeker's allowance because they have been deemed unavailable for work while involved in self-build schemes; and what is her estimate of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers who are aged (i) under 25 years and (ii) over 25 years from deeming availability during a period on a self-build project. [15830]

Mr. Forth: The Employment Service does not collect specific information about unemployed people who receive JSA and who participate in self-build schemes. It is not possible, therefore, to provide any of the estimates requested.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of *(a)* the costs and *(b)* the numbers of under-25-year-olds gaining from (i) the abolition of the 16-hour rule for the jobseeker's allowance, (ii) introducing part-time availability for work to those undertaking part-time study under the 16-hour rule and (iii) removing the requirement on those in part-time study to give up a course if suitable work is available until such time as the course has ended. [15803]

Mr. Forth: We have made no such estimates. The evaluation of the workskill pilots, which we plan to introduce on 7 April 1997, is intended to provide some information of this kind.

Bridging Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people claimed the bridging allowance during 1995–96; what was the average period during which payments were made; and how many claims were refused, by reason for refusal. [15802]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 17 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the number of young people claiming bridging allowance during 1995–96.

The Employment Service does not hold figures on the number of claims for Youth Training Bridging Allowance (YTBA) by young people; the average period during which payment is made; how many claims are refused or the reason for refusal.

The Employment Service does, however, record the total number of young people in receipt of YTBA. In the period April 1995 to March 1996 the total was 41,815.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful.

School Uniforms

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which metropolitan cities have banned school uniforms from local education authority schools; when bans were originally enforced; and if she will make a statement. [16020]

Mrs. Gillan: Information about school uniform policies is not collected centrally. School governing bodies are free to decide for themselves whether their schools should have a uniform.

Teacher (Early Retirement)

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what procedures are in place for auditing the cost to the teachers superannuation scheme of early retirements though ill health and for monitoring the causes of variations between local education authorities in the numbers of early retirements through ill health. [16099]

Mrs. Gillan: The teachers superannuation scheme is subject to an actuarial inquiry every five years, carried out by the Government Actuary's Department. Its report deals with the finances of the scheme and makes recommendations on the total contributions payable by teachers and employers which will meet the cost of benefits—including early retirements—debited to the teachers superannuation account.

We do not monitor the causes of variations between local authorities in the numbers of early retirements through ill health; each application is assessed on an individual basis.

Quantock School

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of Education and Employment what action her Department has taken in response to the recent Office for Standards in Education report on Quantock school, Somerset; and if she will make a statement. [16121]

Mrs. Gillan: Officials have written to the school about the weaknesses identified in the recently published Ofsted report and have sought firm commitments within two months on remedial action. We will consider what further steps may be necessary in the light of the response.

TRANSPORT

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15922]

Mr. Bowis: I will write to the hon. Member when the information he requests is available and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Drink Driving

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the average number of people each week driving with illegal levels of alcohol; and what were the equivalent figures in 1987. [15841]

Mr. Bowis: Information is not available in this form as drivers are tested only following an accident, or on suspicion of having consumed alcohol or of having committed a traffic offence in a moving vehicle.

For several years, male drivers have been asked, in surveys conducted before the Department's Christmas drink-drive campaigns, if at any time in the previous week they had driven after having drunk six or more units of alcohol. In 1987, 7 per cent. admitted to doing this; by 1995, the latest year for which the figure is available, this had fallen to 4 per cent. The effect of consuming six units varies between individuals and circumstances and so this cannot be closely aligned with the legal limit. It does, however, give some indication of the trend.

MV Derbyshire

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *68*, what financial arrangements have been made with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the Discovery Channel; who will have editorial control over the programme; and if he will make a statement. [16039]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for negotiation between Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the Discovery Channel.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Prosecution Guidelines

27. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Attorney-General when the Attorney-General's guidelines on the prosecution of offences were last reviewed; and if he will make a statement. [14437]

The Attorney-General: The Attorney-General's criteria for prosecution issued in 1983 were superseded in 1986 by the code for Crown prosecutors. This was last amended in 1994 to clarify the realistic prospect of conviction test and the public interest factors in favour of prosecution. The fundamental principles have remained unchanged throughout.

Asil Nadir

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the current position on the prosecution of Asil Nadir. [14431]

The Solicitor-General: Asil Nadir stands indicted before the central criminal court on 13 counts of theft. The Crown is ready to proceed. Mr. Nadir should return to the country forthwith.

Government Property Lawyers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the work of the Government property lawyers. [14438]

The Attorney-General: The Government Property Lawyers is an executive agency of the Treasury Solicitor's Department. It provides conveyancing and comprehensive lands advisory services to Government Departments and other publicly funded bodies in England and Wales. The conveyancing services include purchases of land and properties, sales of surplus land, leases of office buildings and various other land transactions. Further information about the work of the agency is obtainable from the annual report and accounts 1995–96, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Albania

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects for democracy in Albania; and if he will make a statement. [15780]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: There has been significant progress in democracy in Albania in recent years. However, Council of Europe reports make it clear that deficiencies remain. We continue to press the Albanian Government both bilaterally and through the EU for improvements in democratic practices and for the involvement of all parties in the process of constitutional reform.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements exist to ensure that payments from the know-how fund and other aid funds to Albania are used effectively and are not subject to any corrupt practices; and if he will make a statement. [15784]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The know-how fund provides support for Albania by funding the costs of British expertise, or know-how, for specific projects. The fund closely monitors and evaluates all its projects, both as they are running and after they are complete. In this way, it can ensure that the projects are correctly and cost-effectively implemented and have achieved their objectives. The fund also employs independent consultants to assess the success and impact of the projects it funds.

Other British aid funds to Albania come from the emergency aid department of the Overseas Development Administration. In 1996–97 its support has so far consisted of a single grant of £100,000 to a World Health Organisation programme for prevention of poliomyelitis. This programme was evaluated in January 1997 by an EMAD staff member and found to be satisfactory.

For EC programmes, to which we also contribute, there are separate procedures, agreed by the member states, for ensuring that funds are correctly spent.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Albanian authorities about the conduct of the Albanian police in dealing with recent public protests; and if he will make a statement. [15778]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We are appalled by the violence used by both police and demonstrators in Vlora. We have made clear our views to the Albanian authorities.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the *(a)* role and *(b)* profits of United Kingdom consultancy firms in Albania; and if he will make a statement. [15779]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: There are a number of UK consultancies active in Albania, working under contract to a variety of organisations. We do not hold information on their respective profits.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received about the contribution of smuggling to the Albanian economy; and if he will make a statement. [15781]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: There are no reliable estimates of the effect of smuggling on the Albanian economy. Our aim is to see a prosperous and stable Albania. We therefore strongly support the work of the International Monetary Fund, which has implemented an economic reform programme in Albania.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received about the level of pyramid selling in Albania; when he expects that problem to be resolved; and what contribution Her Majesty's Government are making to resolving the problem. [15783]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Albanian media reports suggest that 50 to 70 per cent. of the population may have invested money in pyramid schemes. The problem is therefore unlikely to be resolved quickly. The United Kingdom has offered technical expertise through the UK know-how fund to help the Albanian Government. With our EU partners, we are considering whether there is a role for the EU.

European Institutions (Running Costs)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his current estimate of the annual running costs of *(a)* the European Commission, *(b)* the European Parliament, *(c)* the European Court of Justice and *(d)* other EU institutions. [15727]

Mr. David Davis: The running costs of EU institutions in 1995, 1996 and 1997 are as follows:

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
Commission	2,538.6	2,696.7	2,798.1
Parliament	832.1	802.7	887.2
Council	306.2	307.0	320.3
Court of Justice	112.9	169.7	123.1
Court of Auditors	50.0	56.2	57.7
Economic and Social Committee	25.0	27.6	27.9
Committee of the Regions	10.5	16.1	15.6
Joint organisational structure (supports the Economic and Social Committee of the Regions)	49.8	52.6	53.8

All figures are commitments in mecu and are rounded to the nearest 0.1 mecu. The 1995 figures are taken from the Court of Auditors annual report concerning the financial year 1995. The 1996 and 1997 figures have been taken from the general budget of the European Union for these years.

UN Rapid Deployment Brigade

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the joint appeal by the Foreign Ministers of Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands for the creation of a UN rapid deployment brigade; and if he will make a statement. [15825]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We welcome this initiative. We are, however, concerned that earmarking specific troops for the proposed force would place restrictions on our ability to provide the most appropriate UK contribution in a particular UN operation. We would also be concerned about the possible effect on our other operational responsibilities.

We support the UN Secretary-General's standby force planning arrangements, under which UN member states declare the forces and assets they are prepared to provide on a case-by-case basis. We have provided the UN secretariat with detailed information on UK forces we might make available, and have encouraged others to do the same.

Sudan

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to assist the combatant parties in Sudan to reach a negotiated settlement which provides for self-determination for the southern population; what measures he has taken to date to assist the peace process; and if he will make a statement. [15794]

Mr. Hanley: We have fully supported the peace initiative of the intergovernmental authority for development. The declaration of principles produced under that initiative included the right of self-determination for southern Sudan. In our frequent contacts with the parties, we continue to urge a negotiated end to the war.

Israel

Sir Cyril Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of Israel's compliance with the EU–Israel association agreement. [16110]

Mr. Hanley: The EU–Israel association agreement is not yet in force. When it is in force, the association committee to be established under article 70 and to be made up of officials representing both parties will be responsible for the implementation of the agreement. Any major issues arising under the agreement will be examined by the association council to be established

under article 67 with representatives from both parties which will meet at ministerial level. It has the power to take decisions binding on the parties for the purpose of attaining the objectives of the agreement.

Sir Cyril Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the compliance of the Israeli authorities with the EU's Dublin declaration relating to the immediate lifting of the blockade in Palestine. [16123]

Mr. Hanley: There has been some increase in the number of permits available for Palestinians to work in Israel. We will continue to press for freer passage for Palestinian goods. We welcome the parties' renewed commitment to tackle outstanding issues from the interim agreement, such as the opening of Gaza airport and the construction of Gaza port. With our full backing, the EU special envoy to the peace process has begun a constructive dialogue with both sides on how to remove the remaining problems.

China

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the Government of China concerning their contributions to global warming; and if he will make a statement. [15946]

Dr. Liam Fox: We are in regular discussion with all countries, including China, which are part of the negotiating process to mitigate climate change under the framework convention on climate change. We have urged all countries to contribute to a successful outcome to the third conference of the parties at Kyoto in December, and have proposed that developed countries should take the lead by reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 5 to 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been *(a)* murdered and *(b)* injured in (i) Roman Catholic and (ii) Protestant places of worship by terrorists in Northern Ireland since 1968. [13848]

Sir John Wheeler: The information regarding murders is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The information requested on injuries is not available.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Roman Catholic maintained schools, *(b)* Roman Catholic churches, *(c)* controlled schools, *(d)* Protestant church properties and *(e)* Orange halls have been attacked in each year since 1968 in Northern Ireland. [13846]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is not held in precisely the format requested and is not available for the full period requested.

The information that is available is as follows:

(a), (c) Attacks on School Property

1994: 23

1995: 39

1996: 60.

(b), (d) Attacks on Church Property

1994: 20

1995: 52

1996: 53.

(e) Attacks on Orange Halls

1990: 6

1991: 11

1992: 17

1993: 12

1994: 8

1995: 42

1996: 32.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* Roman Catholic churches and *(b)* Protestant churches have closed in each year since 1968 because of terrorist attack in Northern Ireland. [13847]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is not available.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if any of the birds involved in the recent outbreak of Newcastle disease had been given the vaccine prior to contamination; and if he will make a statement. [13606]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* None of the birds involved in the recent outbreak of Newcastle disease in Northern Ireland had been given vaccine prior to becoming infected with the disease.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of *(a)* chickens and *(b)* turkeys on farms in Northern Ireland are currently vaccinated against Newcastle disease; and if he will make a statement. [13603]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 31 January 1997]:* Vaccination of poultry against Newcastle disease is normally prohibited in Northern Ireland.

Following an outbreak of the disease on a broiler production unit near Lurgan, County Armagh on 7 February 1997, ring vaccination has been carried out by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland within a 10 km zone of the infected premises: 52,000 chickens—0.35 per cent. of chickens in Northern Ireland—and 2,000 turkeys—0.50 per cent. of turkeys on farms in Northern Ireland—were vaccinated.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current status of his Department's litigation against Arthur Andersen over the demise of DeLorean Motors. [14811]

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Economic Development legal action against Arthur Andersen and Company in the US remains. The judge in the case has decided, following a hearing in New York on 28 and 29 October 1996, to dismiss the Department's

federal law claims and transfer the common law claims to state court. The Department is considering whether to appeal this judgment.

Gun Laws

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many letters he has received concerning the proposed changes in gun laws; how many and what proportion *(a)* favoured and *(b)* did not favour the complete banning of handguns; and if he will make a statement about the time scale for his proposals as regards the law in Northern Ireland. [14837]

Sir John Wheeler: To date a total of 96 letters has been received about the possible implications for Northern Ireland of the Government's proposals for firearms reform in Great Britain following Lord Cullen's report. Of these, two—2.8 per cent.—were in favour of and 90—93.75 per cent.—were opposed to a total ban on handguns. A further four letters were received which were of a simple inquiry nature. The Secretary of State has yet to decide what reforms he would like to see introduced but, on current plans, it remains his intention to have the amending legislation in place during the latter part of the 1997–98 parliamentary Session.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which projects have been given private finance initiative approval; which projects have been authorised to seek PFI funding; which projects are being considered as suitable for PFI funding; and if he will make a statement on the progress of the PFI in Northern Ireland. [15321]

Sir John Wheeler: The private finance initiative in Northern Ireland is beginning to gather momentum. NI Departments and the Northern Ireland Office are committed to making the maximum use of private finance opportunities, and have appointed appropriate personnel to advance the initiative as effectively as possible within their own programmes. Projects approved under the private finance initiative to date include a contract energy services scheme at Holywell hospital, car parking facilities at the Royal group of hospitals, and leasing of medical and other equipment. All capital projects are required to consider private finance solutions, details of projects which are currently under consideration for PFI are given in the table.

	Project
Bangor and Kinnegar sewerage treatment works	Design, build, finance and operate
Hydro electric project	Hydro electric scheme
Westlink urban motorway	Design, build, finance and operate
Motorway emergency telephone system	Replace and operate system
Strangford ferry	Replace ferry
Holywood road, social security office	Government office accommodation
Hydebank	Government office accommodation
DVTA vehicle testing project	Vehicle testing and information technology
Land registry IT system	Computerisation
Planning service IT system	Computerisation
Antrim bus station/library	Bus station/library
Ulsterbus/Citybus	Bus replacement
Northern Ireland railways	Class 80 rolling stock replacement
Ulster folk and transport museum	Visitors centre
North west institute of further and higher education	Additional teaching accommodation
Belfast institute of further and higher education	Additional teaching accommodation
St. Genevieve's high school	New accommodation
Drumglass high school	New accommodation
Wellington college	Refurbishment
Balmoral high school	Refurbishment
Ulster hospital	Extension/refurbishment
Downe hospital	New block/refurbishment
Belfast city hospital	New renal dialysis facilities
Belfast city hospital	Car park facilities on site
Causeway hospital	Contract energy services
Daisy Hill hospital	Renal dialysis facilities
Craigavon area hospital	Contract energy services
Clinical waste disposal	Development of clinical waste facility
Royal group of hospitals	Theatres and intensive care equipment
T and EA IT system	Computerisation

In addition to the projects listed on the table, the Department of Education is also undertaking a market sounding study of its schools estate in order to assess the wider potential for PFI in respect of more than 100 high-priority schools projects.

Farm and Countryside Enhancement Scheme

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what payments have been made in respect of each of the approved applications for the farm and countryside enhancement scheme. [15468]

Mr. Ancram: None of the applications received has been approved and no payments have been made under the farm and countryside enhancement scheme.

Health Clinic Facilities (Armagh)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what public funds are involved in the proposed purchase of Thompson's egg store, Dobbin street, Armagh, to provide additional health clinic facilities; and if he will make a statement; [15471]

(2) what plans he has to sell the doctors' health clinic at Dobbin street, Armagh; and if he will make a statement. [15472]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subjects in these questions has been delegated to Health Estates under its chief executive, Mr. R. H. Browne. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from R. H. Browne to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 14 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State regarding plans to sell the health centre at Dobbin Street Lane, Armagh and the use of public funds in the purchase of Thompson's Egg Store, Armagh.

Whilst no formal approach has been made, it is understood that the general practitioners who operate from the health centre are interested in buying the property. In the event of an approach being received from the general practitioners, the property would be offered to them at a price negotiated by the Valuation and Lands Agency. The sale would be conditional upon a lease-back arrangement in respect of the accommodation occupied by staff of Armagh and Dungannon HSS Trust.

As regards Thompson's Egg Store, I am not aware of any proposal, involving public funds, to purchase the store for the provision of additional health facilities.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Queen's University (Student Intake)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children progressed from each *(a)* controlled, *(b)* maintained and *(c)* other schools to Queen's university in (i) 1994, (ii) 1995 and (iii) 1996. [15473]

Mr. Ancram: The last educational institutions attended by Northern Ireland domiciled first year full-time undergraduate students aged under 21 were as follows:

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Controlled schools	449	461	n/a
Maintained schools	128	113	n/a
Other schools	1,281	1,390	n/a
FE/unknown/other	362	377	n/a
Total	2,220	2,341	—

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students went to Queen's university from *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Great Britain, *(c)* the Republic of Ireland and *(d)* elsewhere in each of the last three years. [15474]

Mr. Ancram: The information for full-time undergraduate students is as follows:

Domicile	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Northern Ireland	2,557	2,494	2,642
Great Britain	68	52	104
Republic of Ireland	201	200	275
Elsewhere	157	171	241
Total	2,983	2,917	3,262

Union Flag

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the Union flag was not flown at the Department of Agriculture, the Mall, Armagh city on 6 February; if a Union flag has been provided for this public building; if a schedule of dates for flying the Union flag has been advised to the staff; if the person responsible was prepared to carry out this duty; and if he will make a statement. [15573]

Mr. Ancram: I regret that the Union flag was not flown on the day of Her Majesty's accession. This building was completely refurbished recently and reoccupied by new staff who were unable to trace the original flag which had been moved to another location. A flag has been ordered, a list of dates for flying the flag provided and arrangements are now in place to have a person responsible for carrying out this duty.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the Union flag was not flown at the Department of Agriculture, 2 Newry road, Armagh city on 6 February; if a Union flag has been provided for this public building; if the schedule of dates for flying the Union flag has been advised to the staff; if the person responsible was prepared to carry out this duty; and if he will make a statement. [15572]

Mr. Ancram: I regret that the Union flag was not flown on the day of Her Majesty's accession due to an oversight. A Union flag is available for the building and a list of dates had been advised. The person responsible is prepared to carry out the duty and steps have been taken to ensure that the mistake is not repeated.

Raising School Standards Initiative

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the schools which *(a)* have participated and *(b)* are participating in the raising school standards initiative; and if he will make a statement. [16006]

Mr. Ancram: The information has been placed in the Library.

WALES

Job Creation

11. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made to define specific targets for the Welsh Development Agency and other bodies involved in the creation of new jobs in Wales, to secure a larger number of job opportunities in the western parts. [14451]

Mr. Hague: I have already announced that I will be setting new and far more demanding targets for jobs outside the eastern M4 and A55 corridors.

18. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of jobs created by inward investment since 1979. [14458]

Mr. Hague: Since April 1983, when the Welsh Development Agency began a database of investment into Wales, more than 59,000 new jobs have been promised by overseas-generated projects.

19. **Sir Wyn Roberts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs have been *(a)* created and *(b)* safeguarded since 1992; and what estimate he has made of the number of jobs to be created in the next financial year as a result of Government policies to assist (i) employment creation and (ii) inward investment. [14459]

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. On the basis of projects involving regional selective assistance since April 1992, firms have forecast some 43,000 new jobs to be created and 19,800 safeguarded. Of these, more than 22,500 new jobs and 12,600 safeguarded jobs involve overseas-owned firms.

Hospital Admissions (Suspension)

12. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh hospitals have had to suspend non-emergency admissions in the past three months. [14452]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I understand that 15 Welsh hospitals have closed at different times to non-emergency admissions since the beginning of November.

I have been impressed by the way in which health authorities and trusts have worked together to minimise the impact of medical emergency admissions on elective cases. This is a significant improvement over previous years.

Job Insecurity

13. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of job insecurity in Wales. [14453]

Mr. Hague: In spring 1996, according to the labour force survey, 8.3 per cent. of Welsh employees were in temporary employment.

Activity Centres (Safety)

14. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement regarding the implementation of the Activity Centres (Young Person's Safety) Act 1995 in Wales. [14454]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: During the transitional period for inspecting and licensing existing providers, Tourism Quality Services Ltd., the designated licensing authority, will be carrying out inspections of all operators on Wales falling within the scope of the Act. Good progress is being made and Tourism Quality Services is on course to complete its inspections by 1 October.

Roads Expenditure

16. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been spent by his Department on *(a)* motorways and *(b)* major trunk roads in Wales in each of the past five years, at constant prices. [14456]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Separate figures for motorways and major trunk roads are not available. Total expenditure on motorways and trunk roads in Wales in each of the past five years at 1995–96 prices was:

	£ million
1991–92	151.0
1992–93	188.0
1993–94	208.2
1994–95	199.4
1995–96	193.8

Devolved Government

17. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has received on the introduction of devolved government in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [14457]

Mr. Hague: Eleven since the beginning of January 1996, the majority being against the creation of a Welsh Assembly.

Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent measures he has taken to reduce unemployment in Wales. [14455]

Mr. Hague: I have set—and continue to set—challenging job creation targets for the various Government agencies in Wales. These targets are being met or exceeded.

Technical Advice

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the *(a)* individuals and their relevant work establishment and *(b)* organisations which were sent copies of each of the draft technical advice notes which his Department has published for consultation; if he will list those which have submitted responses to date; and if he will make a statement; [15239]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* individuals and their relevant work establishment and *(b)* organisations who were sent copies of each of the technical advice notes which his Department has now published; if he will list those that submitted responses; and if he will make a statement. [15240]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The following lists have been placed in the Library of the House:

1. Planning Guidance (Wales), Technical Advice Notes (Wales). Recipients of consultation.
2. Planning Guidance (Wales), Technical Advice Notes (Wales). Recipients (1) of published advice notes. There have been no responses to the published documents.
3. Respondents to the public consultation versions of the published advice notes 1–8.
4. Respondents to date, to the public consultation exercise on advice notes 9–23. This public consultation exercise ends on 21 February 1997.
5. Consultees on advice notes on "Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas" and "Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology" (2).

(ii) Respondents to the consultation.

(iii) Recipients of the published circulars (1).

Note:

(1) Those to whom copies were sent by the Welsh Office.

(2) These advice notes were published by Cadw as circulars.

St. Asaph Business Park

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the original targets set for *(a)* the number of units, *(b)* the acreage of land and *(c)* the number of jobs created in respect of the St. Asaph business park; what percentage of these targets have been met; what has been the cost of the business park; and what funding has been received from European grant aid. [16109]

Mr. Hague: This is an operational matter for the Welsh Development Agency. I have asked the agency's acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the details requested and I shall arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) of 3 February, *Official Report,*

columns *517–18*, what part of the additional expenditure under the *(a)* industry and *(b)* other sub-heads expenditure in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99 will count towards the eligible expenditure of the Welsh Development Agency under its (1) approved and (2) proposed financial limits. [16198]

Mr. Hague: The planned additional expenditure that will count towards the eligible expenditure of the Welsh Development Agency shown in the table that I provided on 3 February 1997, *Official Report*, columns *517–18*, is as follows:

	1997–98 *£ million* *Cash prices*	*1998–99* *£ million* *Cash prices*
Industry	44.7	82.4

It is expected that there will be sufficient headroom for the 1997–98 provision to be accommodated within the current financial limit. However, the limit will need to be raised to accommodate the 1998–99 provision.

Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the implementation of the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996; and if he will make a statement. [14446]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government intend to bring the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996 into force on 1 April 1997. The implementation of the Act will be monitored as part of the Department's general monitoring of community care.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Pollution

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list *(a)* the location of and *(b)* the number of fish killed in each of the (i) category 1 and (ii) category 2 pollution incidents caused by each of the water and sewerage companies in 1995; [14979]

(2) how many fish were killed in *(a)* category 1 and *(b)* category 2 pollution incidents caused by the water and sewerage companies in each year from 1989 to 1995. [14980]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* I have arranged for the relevant details of category 1 and 2 water pollution incidents which occurred in 1995 and were attributed by the Environment Agency to water and sewerage companies in each agency region to be placed in the Libraries of the House. Data are not available on the numbers of fish killed as a result of incidents that took place before 1995.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new documentation will be considered in the extended period of evaluation announced on 5 February, in respect of the Nirex application to contract a rock characterisation facility at Longlands farm, Gosforth, in Cumbria; if he proposes the inspector at the public inquiry on the RCF should review this new documentation; and if he will make a statement. [15448]

Mr. Gummer: Before reaching a decision on the planning appeal concerning this application I am considering the evidence brought to my attention which is relevant. I am also considering how any relevant evidence should be reviewed.

Commission for the New Towns (Corby)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total sum realised by the sale of assets by the Commission for the New Towns in Corby for each year since 1979–80. [15733]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Commission for the New Towns took over from the Corby new town development corporation in 1980. The total sum realised by the sale of assets in Corby each year since then is as follows:

Year	*Amount* *£ million*
1980–81	0.913
1981–82	0.557
1982–83	5.723
1983–84	2.495
1984–85	1.470
1985–86	1.772
1986–87	4.220
1987–88	10.249
1988–89	17.410
1989–90	38.087
1990–91	7.541
1991–92	2.498
1992–93	0.558
1993–94	0.368
1994–95	9.507
1995–96	1.943
Total	105.311

Local Authority Employees (Northamptonshire)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were employed by each local authority in Northamptonshire *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in each year since 1992. [15732]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information is given in the table.

The levels of employment in individual authorities are not directly comparable because of variations in population structure, social characteristics, hours worked by part-time staff, and the extent to which they use private firms and contractors or act as agents for other authorities.

Numbers employed directly by local authorities in Northamptonshire: (excluding Law and Order)
At June of each year

Authority	1992		1993		1994		1995		1996	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Northamptonshire[2]	8,911	10,262	7,640	9,707	[1]—	[1]—	7,247	10,088	[1]—	[1]—
Corby	613	133	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	527	130	505	114
Daventry	315	86	312	89	344	96	311	128	315	111
East Northamptonshire	203	57	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Kettering	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	365	190	363	235
Northamptonshire South	1,518	151	1,429	255	1,396	180	1,351	299	1,343	311
Northampton	342	43	336	74	334	63	294	109	267	53
Wellingborough	383	119	346	116	339	112	325	111	308	108

Source:
Joint Staffing Watch.
1996 figures are provisional.
[1] Data not available.
[2] In making comparisons between years it should be noted that staffing levels within county councils have been affected by (a) the removal of further education institutions from the local authority sector and (b) local authorities taking on responsibility for Community Care. Both these changes took place from April 1993.

Environment Agency (Prosecutions)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the prosecutions carried out in England and Wales by the Environment Agency for waste offences, in each month since 1 April 1996, indicating *(a)* the person or company prosecuted, *(b)* the date and outcome of the prosecution, *(c)* the nature of the offence and *(d)* the penalty imposed. [15671]

Mr. Clappison: Data relating to prosecutions by the Environment Agency for waste offences are not yet held centrally, although detailed records are held at a local level.

The agency does, of course, recognise the need to collate and manage its data effectively and has already taken significant steps towards drawing up a coherent national policy on data management, addressing the many disparate data collection and information systems inherited by the agency on 1 April 1996. It is also considering a number of policy options that will enable information relating to all of its enforcement activities to be made fully available. As I said in my answer of 16 October 1996, *Official Report,* columns *1045–46,* when data on waste offences are centrally available I will write to the hon. Member about it.

Global Warming

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sums were provided to institutions and research bodies in connection with research and information on global warming in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what amount is planned to be spent in the coming year. [15945]

Mr. Clappison: In 1996–97, the Department of Environment is providing about £14.5 million to institutions and research bodies for research and information specifically related to climate change. A similar amount is likely to be spent in the coming financial year.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his Department's current estimates of global temperature rises over the 1951 to 1980 average; and if he will list the sources of research from which the estimates are drawn. [15947]

Mr. Clappison: The global temperature in 1996 was 0.265 deg. C above the 1951 to 1980 average; this was the eighth warmest year since instrumental records began in 1860.

The global temperature in 1995 was 0.425 deg. C above the 1951 to 1980 average; this was the warmest year since instrumental records began.

These data are compiled from observations made at more than 1,000 land meteorological stations and a similar number of ships and buoys around the world; analysis of the data is undertaken by the UK Meteorological Office, which supplied those statistics.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions have been held within the European Council on the European contribution to global warming; and if he will make a statement. [15944]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Council regularly discusses climate change issues, including the sources and scale of European greenhouse gas emissions and the action which should be taken under the framework convention on climate change to counter the threat of climate change.

Factory Shop Complex (Ashford)

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision on the next stage of the proposed factory shop complex in Ashford. [15707]

Sir Paul Beresford: We are considering the representations made on this matter and hope to issue our decision as soon as possible.

Estate Action Schemes

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the forecast level of local authority

matching funding contribution required by the Department of the Environemnt in 1997–98 and the next two financial years to fund estate action schemes. [15888]

Sir Paul Beresford: The phasing of estate action grant by scheme in 1997–98 and the next two years—and hence the phasing of local authorities' required contributions to schemes—is currently being finalised. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the requested figures are available.

Local Government Finance

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answers of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *98–100*, and 11 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *213–14*, if he will now update the answers based on the final local government financial settlement for 1997–98. [15952]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have place in the Library a table for standard spending assessment plus police grant for all local authorities and a table showing the adjustments made to the 1996–97 amounts.

The remaining tables, for total standard spending and aggregate exchequer finance for the main local authority groups, total external support for individual authorities, and for regional analyses, will be placed in the Library shortly.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each individual local authority and class of local authority in England at 31 March 1996 *(a)* the total value of fixed assets, *(b)* the long-term and temporary external debt outstanding and *(c)* the value of fixed assets net of total external debt ranked by the value of fixed assets net of external debt. [15852]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have today placed the information requested in the Library of the House.

Climate Change Convention

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to submit a report to the United Nations, setting out the United Kingdom's progress in meeting its commitments under the UN framework convention on climate change; and if he will make a statement. [16443]

Mr. Gummer: I intend to publish, tomorrow, the United Kingdom's second report under the framework convention on climate change, "Climate Change, the UK Programme", copies of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Rough Sleeping

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to encourage local authorities to assess levels of rough sleeping in their areas and to develop strategies to tackle any problem that they identify. [16303]

Mr. Curry: Under the rough sleepers initiative, my Department has encouraged and assisted head counts of people sleeping rough in a number of areas. Following the Government's announcement in March 1996 that they would continue the rough sleepers initiative in central London and extend it to Bristol, my Department commissioned Shelter to co-ordinate evaluations of the level of rough sleeping in 23 areas where some evidence of a problem had been mentioned in consultation with local authorities and other statutory and voluntary sector agencies. The evaluations were conducted during June and July 1996 and Shelter's report to the Department informed the Government's decisions, announced on 31 October, *Official Report*, column *187*, to expand the rough sleepers initiative in London and extend it to Brighton; and to offer financial support from a new rough sleepers revenue fund for strategies to tackle rough sleeping in 10 other areas.

As part of that announcement, I said that the Department would publish guidance to help all local authorities to assess the extent of rough sleeping in their areas and to develop effective strategies to help people sleeping rough. I am pleased to announce publication today of that guidance, which is being made available free to all housing authorities and voluntary sector agencies working with people sleeping rough. Copies have been placed in the Library.

My Department's housing strategies guidance to local authorities advises them that they should aim to make it unnecessary for anyone to sleep rough within their area and that they should aim to provide a strategic framework of assistance covering all the agencies involved in meeting the needs of single homeless people, including people sleeping rough. That guidance advises local authorities to consider undertaking a count of rough sleepers to assist in assessing local needs. I hope that local authorities for areas in which rough sleeping problems exist will make use of the more detailed guidance published today. The Government will consider extending funding under the rough sleepers initiative and the rough sleepers revenue fund to areas where the guidance has been followed, where major rough sleeping problems have been demonstrated and where local authorities take a lead in developing joint statutory and voluntary sector strategies to tackle rough sleeping.

Minerals Compensation Regulations

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the results of public consultation on new minerals compensation regulations; and if he will make a statement. [16305]

Sir Paul Beresford: Public consultation on the new minerals compensation regulations closed on 24 January. Thirty-three responses were received by my Department. A summary of the key points has been placed in the House Library together with the Government response. The regulations have been laid before Parliament today and are subject to approval by affirmative resolution in both Houses.

I am also making available in the Library a monitoring report, published in October 1996, which shows how the compliance costs associated with the minerals reforms introduced by the Environment Act 1995 have been assessed.

Estates Renewal Challenge Fund

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the allocation for the 1997–98 round of the estates renewal challenge fund. [16304]

Mr. Curry: I shall be announcing allocations for the 1997–98 round of the estates renewal challenge fund tomorrow and shall place copies of the press notice detailing the successful authorities in the Libraries of both Houses.

Asbestos

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the Health and Safety Commission's recommendations relating to the future of the regulatory regime for asbestos; and if he will make a statement. [16442]

Mr. Gummer: I have written to the Health and Safety Commission welcoming and accepting its timely advice on a range of asbestos issues. It has recommended that we maintain our existing policy, to work with our EU partners to extend the ban on asbestos to all types of asbestos, with a limited number of exceptions for genuinely essential uses where safe and effective substitutes cannot be found at affordable cost.

The HSC has also said that, in the light of responses to its May 1996 discussion document "The future of the lead and asbestos regulations", it has asked the Health and Safety Executive to consider and develop, where appropriate, proposals for some changes to the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983 and the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987. It plans to publish a consultative document in 1998. This represents a progressive yet sensible approach to this difficult subject, and I welcome the initiative.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his plans for the development of the local authority role in waste recycling. [16556]

Mr. Gummer: A review group on the local authority role in recycling was established last year, comprising members from local government, from private sector producers, waste disposal operators and users of recycled waste, from community groups, and from central government. Its report has now been finalised and submitted to me and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. It contains a number of proposals, including for local authorities to work together to produce municipal waste management strategies, and emphasises the importance of an integrated approach to waste management. I and my right hon. Friend are today issuing the report for consultation, and will consider its recommendations in the light of comments received. Copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

Local authorities have a vital role to play in helping to achieve the goal of sustainable development. I welcome the group's report as a positive contribution to the development of that role, and am grateful to its members for the time and effort they have put into the group's work.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the White Paper on sustainable development will be published; and if he will make a statement. [16557]

Mr. Gummer: We will publish "This Common Inheritance: UK Annual Report 1997" tomorrow, Tuesday 18 February 1997. Copies will be placed in the Library.

The White Paper reports progress during 1966 in meeting the commitments we made in previous White Papers and in the 1994 UK sustainable development strategy, as well as making commitments for future action. In particular, it highlights our new priorities for the year ahead and brings together the key quantified targets already agreed by Government or under consideration.

Cash Limits

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change the 1996-97 cash limits and running cost limits for which he is responsible. [14301]

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his answer, 31 January 1997, c. 389]:* The Department of the Environment/European regional development fund non-voted cash limit was incorrectly shown as being reduced by £4,995,000 from £183,295,000 to £178,300,000. This should have shown the DOE/ERDF non-voted cash limit as being reduced by £4,965,000 from £182,782,000 to £177,817,000. This reflects transfers of £4,518,000 to sections M and N on vote 2—regeneration and countryside and wildlife—and £447,000 to the Department of Transport.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioner Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the value of the 25p age addition to the retirement pension in 1997–98 if it had been uprated by *(a)* prices and *(b)* earnings since its introduction; and if he will estimate how much it would cost to increase it to these levels. [14281]

Mr. Heald: The 25p age addition to the retirement pension was first introduced in September 1971. In 1997–98 it would be worth £1.70 if uprated by prices and £3.80 if uprated by average earnings[1]. The estimated costs are in the table[2]:

Age addition in 1997–98	*Uprated by prices to £1.70*	*Uprated by earnings to £3.80*
Gross cost	£180 million	£440 million
Net cost	£110 million	£260 million

[1] The uprated value of the age addition has been calculated by assuming that it was uprated each time Retirement Pension was uprated and all calculations were rounded to the nearest 5p at each uprating date. The upratings have been calculated using either the Average Earnings Index (whole economy unadjusted) as published by the Office for National Statistics or the Retail Prices Index (all items) as appropriate.

[2] All costs are rounded to the nearest £10 million. The gross costs of uprating were estimated by the Government Actuary's Department. The costs net of the impact on income-related benefits have been calculated using offset ratios of 42 per cent.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, columns *191-92*, if he will list *(a)* total expenditure on national insurance benefits, including administration but not including incentives to personal pensions, *(b)* total receipts of the national insurance funds, *(c)* the amount of the surplus over receipts and *(d)* the percentage of *(b)* over *(a)* in each year from 1979–80 to 1995, at 1995–96 prices. [14274]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	(A) National Insurance Benefit expenditure and administration cost[1] *(£ billion)*	*(B) Total National Insurance Fund receipts*[1 2] *(£ billion)*	*(C) Column B—Column A*[1]	*(D) Percentage of Column B over Column A*
1979–80	32.6	34.1	1.6	104.8
1980–81	33.6	34.7	1.1	103.3
1981–82	35.5	33.7	–1.8	95.0
1982–83	35.7	35.8	0.1	100.3
1983–84	36.1	37.2	1.2	103.2
1984–85	36.4	37.2	0.8	102.2
1985–86	36.8	37.4	0.6	101.6
1986–87	38.3	39.2	0.9	102.4
1987–88	37.6	40.1	2.6	106.8
1988–89	36.2	41.1	4.9	113.6
1989–90	35.8	39.2	3.3	109.3
1990–91	36.5	41.1	4.6	112.5
1991–92	39.5	38.9	–0.7	98.3
1992–93	40.4	38.4	–2.0	95.0
1993–94	41.9	46.4	4.5	110.8
1994–95	41.7	46.4	4.7	111.3

Notes:
[1] Figures have been independently rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion.
[2] Excludes income from National Insurance contributions allocated to the National Health Service. Includes Treasury Supplement from 1979–80 to 1988–89 inclusive and Treasury Grant for 1993–94 to 1994–95.
Source:
National Insurance Fund Accounts.

Social Security Appeals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *721*, how many of the 51 notices issued by the clerk to the social security appeal tribunal covering the Newport, Gwent, area in the week commencing 9 December 1996 resulted in requests for oral hearings by *(a)* the claimant only, *(b)* the adjudication officer only and *(c)* both the claimant and the adjudication officer; and how many of those requests were made within 10 days of receipt of the notice. [15735]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for the independent tribunal service.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if a consistent policy or practice has been specified for the various departments of social security offices as regards the procedure for issuing national insurance numbers; if he will set out the criteria that have to be fulfilled to obtain a national insurance number; and if he will publish procedural *(a)* guidelines or *(b)* advice he has issued. [16222]

Mr. Heald: The Department of Social Security has a corporate policy and guidance for staff on allocation and registration of national insurance numbers.

Most young people who live in Great Britain or Northern Ireland, and for whom child benefit is in payment, are automatically registered for NI and issued with a plastic NINO card shortly before they reach 16.

In other circumstances, most usually for people entering this country from abroad, a person applies to be registered by calling into their social security office, taking with them acceptable evidence of identity, and completing an application for NINO allocation and registration.

Thorough checks are made to ensure that the person does not already have a NINO and their identity is established in accordance with the departmental guidance outlined in the "Evidence of Identity Handbook", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Disabled Ex-service Personnel

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disabled ex-service personnel are registered in Wales. [16038]

Mr. Heald: As at 31 March 1996, the latest date on which figures are available, a total of 22,123 ex-service men and women resident in Wales were receiving war disablement pensions.

Rent Allowances

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the forecast level of growth in expenditure on rent allowances in cash and real terms over the next three years expressed as *(a)* total rent allowances and *(b)* private rented sector allowances excluding

registered social landlords; and what is the forecast for changes in the level of investment in local authority and registered social landlord housing stock over the same period. [15889]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Rent allowance expenditure forecasts

£ millions

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*Total change*
Cash terms	5,378	5,749	6,285	7,029	—
Change	—	370	536	744	1,651
Percentage	—	7	9	12	31
Real 1996–97 prices	5,486	5,749	6,162	6,756	—
Change	—	263	413	594	1,270
Percentage change	—	5	7	10	20

Source:
DSS rent allowance expenditure forecasts. Cash data based on figures contained in the Social Security Departmental Report "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1996–97 to 1998–99". Real figures have been based on cash figures adjusted by the GDP deflator.

Public housing investment

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Cash terms			
Local authority	775	499	436
Housing corporation	1,075	692	635
Total	1,850	1,191	1,071
Real 1996–97 prices			
Local authority	775	489	419
Housing corporation	1,075	678	610
Total	1,850	1,168	1,029

Note:
1. The forecast showing a split between private rented sector allowances and registered social landlords is not available.
Source:
Department of the Environment projected public expenditure provision for local authorities' credit approvals for housing. Real figures have been based on cash figures adjusted by the GDP deflator.

Child Support

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends that existing clients of the Child Support Agency will be invited to consider making an application for a variation of their maintenance assessment under the new departures scheme. [16608]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Two hundred and seventy-three thousand of the Child Support Agency's clients have already been invited to apply for a variation of their maintenance assessment under the new departures scheme. The agency expects to be in a position to contact all remaining clients to invite them to apply by April of this year.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep Dips

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the outcome of the review of organophosphorus sheep dips carried out by the Veterinary Products Committee; and if he will make a statement. [16274]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The VPC has carefully and thoroughly examined the effectiveness of the certificate of competence scheme and other issues relating to the use of OP sheep dips. It confirmed earlier advice that, provided that they are used safely and in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions, there is no scientific justification for withdrawing OP sheep dips from the market.

The VPC recommended that the certificate of competence should apply to the use of OP sheep dips as well as their purchase. This objective will be achieved by strengthening measures to secure compliance with existing statutory duties. New guidance will be issued by the Health and Safety Executive which will explain and emphasise the duties placed on farmers under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 and the linked codes of practice to train and instruct their dippers and to maintain their competence. The guidance will contain information about the certificate of competence scheme operated by the National Proficiency Tests Council and will commend certification as a structured approach to these duties and as valuable evidence that adequate training had been given and competence achieved.

The VPC had found some evidence to suggest that a small minority of veterinarians were occasionally supplying OP sheep dips to clients who did not hold a certificate of competence. We will be asking the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to make a clear reference to the undesirability of this practice in its guide to professional conduct.

We also accept the VPC's advice that the reclassification of OP sheep dips from pharmacy and merchants list to prescription-only status would be unnecessary as it would not improve the protection of human safety and, if it deterred farmers from using OP dips prophylactically, it could lead to increased levels of ectoparasitic diseases in sheep.

Officials at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate will examine the current labelling requirements for OP sheep dip products and will submit proposals to the VPC, the objective of which will be to make the information simpler to follow.

The VPC has advised that, in order to improve controls over the disposal of sheep dips, including both OPs and synthetic pyrethroids, there should be a mechanism whereby farmers should notify the water regulators—the environment agencies—that they are using dips and of their proposed methods of disposal. We accept this advice, and the Government are considering what improvements should be made to existing mechanisms for control over the disposal of sheep dips. Any eventual proposals will be subject to public consultation.

The VPC has advised that further basic research into OPs should be carried out, and we accept this advice. We shall be seeking to establish research projects with the further help of the VPC's sub-committee, the medical and scientific panel.

The VPC has suggested that a review of non-OP sheep dips should be conducted to consider whether existing controls on OP dips should be extended to these products. We have asked the VPC to proceed with this review, not least because dips in which the active ingredient is a synthetic pyrethroid are intrinsically hazardous to aquatic life and great care is needed in their use and disposal.

In addition, we have asked the VPC to review the safety of veterinary medicines other than sheep dips which have an organophosphate as the active ingredient.

I would like to thank Professor Aitken, his predecessor Professor Sir James Armour, and the committee for the care and diligence with which they have considered these important issues and all the information put to them, and for their clear advice.

The report setting out the VPC's recommendations to the licensing authority—Agriculture and Health Ministers—is today being placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research is currently being undertaken or financed by his Department into the treatment of sheep dip waste in the context of its disposal in an environmentally safe manner; what recent representations he has received on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [16007]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry has commissioned no research into the treatment of sheep dip waste and we have received no recent representations on this matter. No veterinary medicine is authorised for use unless it meets stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety includes risk to the environment. Applications for marketing authorisations must be supported by information to satisfy the statutory criteria, including details of relevant research. Product labels include warnings about the safe disposal of sheep dips and guidance is available from the agriculture Departments.

Dairy Products

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to encourage the manufacture of cheese by farmers who process milk from their own herds or flocks into milk products. [14991]

Mr. Baldry: The decision by farmers whether to process milk from their own herds or flocks into milk products is a commercial one. However, by deregulating the milk market, the Government have encouraged conditions for competition and initiative to flourish.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek a modification of the existing milk quota system to encourage the production of specialist and traditional dairy products by means of a producer-processor's milk quota allowance for small producers to allow the first tranche of milk quota to be used at double its face value. [14992]

Mr. Baldry: Substantive discussions on the future of the milk quota regime are due to begin later this year in Brussels. The Government have already signalled their preferred approach. We wish to free the whole of the dairy industry, including specialist and traditional producers, from the restrictions of the quota system. This would be achieved through a combination of progressive price cuts and relaxation of production controls. We do not believe that the introduction of a producer-processor allowance for small producers is a negotiable way forward. It would add to the complexity of administering and enforcing the quota system and increase the costs of the dairy regime.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance he proposes for producer-processors and specialist dairy products to mitigate the compliance costs of the milk and food hygiene directives. [14993]

Mr. Baldry: The compliance cost assessment for the Diary Products (Hygiene) Regulations 1995 was placed in the Libraries of the House on 28 April 1995. It indicated that small businesses would incur minimal extra costs resulting from implementation of the milk hygiene directive. The Compliance Cost Assessment for the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995, placed in the Library of the House on 12 July 1995, estimated that the only identifiable cost for businesses arising from implementation of the food hygiene directive related to the new requirement to train and/or instruct food handlers. In the circumstances I have no plans for assistance.

Beef (Intervention Stocks)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much British beef has been bought into intervention since 1 March 1996; and what has been the total cost to public funds. [15477]

Mr. Baldry: Since 1 March 1996, the amount of beef taken into intervention and paid for in the UK is 70,107 tonnes at a cost to public funds of £128 million. In addition, contracts have been awarded for a further 8,036 tonnes of beef only some of which has been delivered to store and none of which is yet due for payment.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide *(a)* his Department's budgeted expenditure on (i) advertising, (ii) publicity and (iii) public information campaigns for the period January

to March 1997 and *(b)* the actual expenditure on (1) advertising, (2) publicity and (3) public information campaigns in the period January to March in each of the past five years. [13462]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* All expenditure by my Department on publicity is in support of public information campaigns. Advertising forms part of publicity.

Details of estimated expenditure by my Department for the period January to March 1997 are:

	Advertising £	*Publications/ exhibitions* £	*Total publicity* £
Violent crime	102,000		
Organ donors	42,000		
Young driver	20,000		
Fire action plan	164,000		
Severe weather warning	35,000		
Pre-school vouchers	950,000		
Total	1,313,000	512,000	1,825,000

Details of actual expenditure for the same period in each of the past five financial years are set out in the table:

	Advertising £	*Publications/ exhibitions* £	*Total publicity* £
January to March 1996	291,000	425,500	716,500
January to March 1995	330,500	574,000	904,500
January to March 1994	494,000	[1]379,000	873,000
January to March 1993	297,500	[1]557,500	855,000
January to March 1992	216,000	[1]329,500	545,500

[1] These figures do not include publications/exhibition expenditure by Historic Scotland. Details for these years are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14470]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are four full-time equivalent—23 members of staff—employed in the application of equal opportunities policies in the Scottish Office. The total staff cost is £86,546.

Scots Pines, Loch Fleet

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place between officials from his Department, officials from Scottish Natural Heritage and representatives of the Sutherland estates concerning the proposed felling of Scots pines at Loch Fleet, near Golspie; and if he will make a statement. [14481]

Mr. Kynoch: There have been several discussions involving officials from the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage and representatives of the Sutherland estates about the management of Scots pines at Loch Fleet. Scottish Natural Heritage is currently negotiating the terms of a proposed management agreement with the Sutherland estates.

Computer Crime

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions in each of the last five years computer systems have been illegally accessed by computer hackers in his Department. [14546]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The Scottish Office is not aware of any such incidents.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of computer hacking, fraud and theft, including theft of computer chips, his Department has recorded in the last five years. [14547]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The Scottish Office is unaware of any cases of computer hacking or fraud in the last five years. There have been 49 unexplained disappearances of computer equipment recorded during this time, seven of which involved computer chips.

Legal Aid

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the 20 firms earning most from civil and criminal legal aid for the year to 31 March 1996; and if he will indicate the number of fee earners per firm and the fees per fee earner. [15356]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information on payments to firms in respect of advice and assistance and civil and criminal legal aid is set out in the table and includes outlays, payments to advocates and VAT. Information on the number of fee earners and fees per fee earner is not available.

	Rank order	*Advice and assistance* £	*Civil* £	*Criminal* £	*Total* £
Ross Harper and Murphy	1	885,312	790,251	2,025,745	3,701,308
More and Co.	2	147,558	4,916	1,715,638	1,868,112
Bruce Short and Co.	3	269,936	38,452	1,471,055	1,779,443
Ian McCarry	4	191,109	17,848	1,273,538	1,482,495

	Rank order	Advice and assistance £	Civil £	Criminal £	Total £
Blair and Bryden	5	357,405	367,440	655,725	1,380,570
Gordon Thomson and Co.	6	303,231	34,184	985,998	1,323,413
George Mathers and Co.	7	269,343	132,117	870,109	1,271,569
Drummond Miller	8	240,517	923,995	106,510	1,271,022*
Gilfedder and McInnes	9	146,295	0	1,078,586	1,233,881
Gallen and Co.	10	236,680	148,411	847,881	1,232,972
Grady and Co.	11	111,699	0	1,049,307	1,161,006
Adams	12	67,963	0	1,038,048	1,106,011
Robert Kerr	13	95,979	0	985,573	1,081,552
McKay and Norwell	14	139,010	217,006	656,609	1,012,625
Livingstone Brown	15	235,161	102,043	669,038	1,006,242
J. C. Hughes and Co.	16	67,303	0	877,700	945,003
Turnbull McCarron	17	218,450	67,343	625,396	911,189
Sinclairs	18	81,180	532	763,323	845,035
Milligan Telford and Morrow	19	72,473	29,176	733,594	835,243
Trainor Alston	20	239,036	192,627	381,460	813,123
Total					26,261,814

M80 Extension

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will initiate a public local inquiry into his Department's decision on the route of the M80 motorway extension between Stepps and Haggs; and if he will make a statement. [15810]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Drafts of the necessary statutory schemes and orders, including the compulsory purchase order, will be published later this year, and the public response to the proposals will be taken into account in any decision as to the need for a public local inquiry.

Scottish Natural Heritage

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the names and occupations of the executive members of Scottish Natural Heritage, indicating their remuneration and the dates upon which their terms of office will end. [15625]

Mr. Kynoch: The information for SNH board members is set out in the table.

Name	Position	Current term expires	Occupation	Remuneration per annum £
Magnus Magnusson KBE	Chairman	31 March 1999	Broadcaster	36,070
Professor T. Christopher Smout CBE	Deputy Chairman	31 March 1998	Director, Institute of Environmental History, St. Andrew's University	15,538
Roy Dennis OBE	—	31 March 1997	Land use consultant	6,474
Alan Blackshaw OBE	—	31 March 1997	Management and Environmental consultant	6,474
Barbara Kelly CBE	Chairman, South West Region	31 March 1998	Partner in dairy business	15,538
Professor Seaton Baxter	Chairman, North East Region	31 March 1998	Professor and reader at Robert Gordon's University	15,538
Professor Roger Wheater OBE	—	31 March 1998	Director, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland	6,474
Nan Burnett OBE	Chairman, South East Region	31 March 1999	Farmer	15,538
Councillor Peter Peacock	—	31 March 1999	Convenor, Highland Council	6,474
Professor Fred Last	—	31 March 1999	Retired Scientist	6,474
Bill Ritchie	Chairman, North West Region	31 March 2000	Crofter, fisherman, countryside ranger	15,538
David Laird	—	31 March 2000	Estate factor, Solicitor	6,474

M74

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many entrance and exit junctions there will be on the M74 motorway when it is completed. [16197]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are two junctions on the M74 between the Maryville interchange and the present end of the motorway at Fullarton road interchange. South Lanarkshire and City of Glasgow councils have planning permission to construct an extension to the motorway from Fullarton road interchange to an interchange with the M8 at the Kingston bridge, which would create a total of seven intermediate junctions between Maryville and Kingston bridge.

Nurses

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nurses were employed by each NHS trust in each year from 1994–96; and if he will make a statement. [16016]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information, which is not yet available centrally for 1996, is set out in the tables:

Nursing staff[1] employed in each NHS trust, in the Scottish health service; by headcount and whole time equivalent: at 30 September 1994

	30 September 1994		30 September 1995	
	Headcount	Whole-time Equivalent	Headcount	Whole-time Equivalent
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	2,178	1,770.8	2,208	1,789.3
Angus NHS Trust	1,162	960.9	1,143	946.2
Argyll and Bute Unit[2]	821	670.7	813	657.4
Ayshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust	1,468	1,268.2	1,482	1,273.2
Borders Community Health Services[2]	699	571.5	719	580.5
Borders General Hospital Acute Unit[2]	548	446.7	560	457.5
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	356	281.4	386	306.8
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	2,119	1,858.8	2,002	1,747.1
Dumbarton Unit[2]	768	579.0	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	854	672.0	873	687.7
Dumfries and Galloway Community Services Unit[2]	1,273	1,011.9	1,216	995.0
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	1,527	1,357.2	1,528	1,355.7
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	1,895	1,521.8	1,900	1,539.7
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	1,464	1,142.5	1,450	1,124.6
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	2,216	1,822.9	2,333	1,928.3
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	404	305.1	463	359.7
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	684	546.7	692	557.1
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	2,055	1,736.0	2,022	1,715.3
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School Unit[2]	11	10.0	11	10.0
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	2,116	1,705.8	2,265	1,881.7
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	3,322	2,770.3	3,176	2,627.2
Greater Glasgow Care for the Elderly Unit	816	637.8	—	—
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	3,924	3,468.5	3,714	3,281.5
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospital NHS Trust	1,032	815.5	1,040	829.8
Highland Community NHS Trust	1,278	1,080.3	1,260	1,068.9
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	581	468.9	598	478.6
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	836	654.2	821	638.5
Lanarkshire Community and Priority Services Unit[2]	2,364	1,983.4	2,352	1,962.8
Law Hospital NHS Trust	983	787.5	980	796.4
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust	—	—	753	568.0
Monklands and Bellshill Hospital NHS Trust	1,083	888.2	1,113	925.6
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	640	522.7	702	574.7
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	1,405	1,131.5	1,435	1,164.5
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	1,420	1,189.7	1,460	1,236.3
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	716	606.5	742	634.4
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	898	713.7	932	747.9
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	1,981	1,658.4	1,972	1,642.0
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	905	728.7	911	745.2
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	2,535	2,125.8	2,453	2,062.1
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	817	692.5	758	642.8
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	1,410	1,168.6	1,641	1,356.0
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	720	571.0	746	592.8
Stobhill NHS Trust	1,173	931.8	1,212	974.2
The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	1,291	1,033.8	1,404	1,120.5
The Yorkhill NHS Trust	968	805.3	988	821.4
West Glasgow Hospital University NHS Trust	1,530	1,302.7	1,784	1,511.0
West Lothian NHS Trust	1,392	1,160.0	1,427	1,190.2
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	1,106	873.8	1,136	903.8

Notes

[1] Excludes bank and agency nurses, nurse teachers, nurses in training and P2000 students.

[2] Directly managed units which became NHS trusts on either 1 April or 1 October 1995.

Source

National Manpower Statistics from payroll ISD Scotland.

Prison Officers

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prison officers, by grade, there were *(a)* in Scotland and *(b)* in each prison in Scotland in each year from 1990–96; and if he will make a statement. [15890]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 17 February 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question regarding the number of prison officers, by grade, in Scotland and in each prison in Scotland in each year from 1990–96.

The Scottish Prison Service introduced a new staffing structure on 1 April 1995. This resulted in the abolition of the previous grading system, and the introduction of new pay bandings covering operational, administrative and support staff. At the same time nursing, works, and administrative functions were civilianised.

An accurate comparison of post-April 1995 figures for "prison officer" numbers with those prior to that date is not possible. The attached table shows in total and for each establishment the total number of Basic Grade Officers, Senior Officers, and Principal Officers at 31 March for each year from 1990–94. A subdivision by grade cannot be obtained from the current database.

The table also shows the current total, with figures for 1995 and 1996, of operational staff posts in those pay bands which from 1 April 1995 are broadly comparable to the grades described above.

It should be noted that the 1990–94 figures include in each year approximately 600 "officers" in the subsequently civilianised nursing, works and administrative functions which are excluded from the 1995, 1996 and 1997 figures.

Scottish prison service—prison officer grades or equivalent from 1990–97

Establishment	*[1]1990*	*[1]1991*	*[1]1992*	*[1]1993*	*[1]1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Aberdeen	100	112	116	127	129	106	108	124
Barlinnie	491	476	449	516	496	418	389	448
Castle Huntly	50	62	70	74	71	59	43	55
Corton Vale	176	167	169	179	177	158	152	173
Dumfries	107	120	141	136	141	129	120	128
Dungavel	49	56	61	67	71	54	39	56
Edinburgh	349	344	358	397	399	339	331	361
Friarton	49	44	49	51	48	37	34	41
Glenochil	356	374	389	410	415	348	319	371
Greenock	123	136	144	155	160	134	122	142
Inverness	86	82	79	88	88	77	81	84
Longriggend	143	141	154	159	158	137	141	145
Low Moss	112	119	130	142	147	134	116	127
Noranside	50	54	68	65	70	55	43	52
Penninghame	27	29	32	33	35	25	20	30
Perth	310	329	360	370	379	319	307	317
Peterhead	265	250	232	246	236	193	187	216
Polmont	229	248	277	294	292	256	234	258
Shotts	332	348	394	395	407	388	331	358
Total	3,404	3,491	3,672	3,904	3,919	3,366	3,117	3,486

[1] Includes approximately 600 officers in the nursing, works and administration functions which are not included from 1995 onwards.

Toll Bridges (Revenue)

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was raised *(a)* by each toll bridge and *(b)* in total from toll bridges in Scotland in each year from 1990 to 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15894]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on toll revenue, to the most recent year for which comprehensive figures are available, is set out in the table:

Tolls levied

£ thousands

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Forth road bridge	7,149	7,284	7,660	7,810	8,143	8,390
Tay road bridge	2,128	2,182	2,904	2,896	2,921	3,052
Erskine bridge[1]	2,646	2,814	3,624	4,034	4,070	4,248
Skye bridge	—	—	—	—	—	[2]398
Totals	11,923	12,280	14,188	14,740	15,134	16,088

[1] Figures for tolls levied on Erskine bridge are for financial years which begin on 1 April of the year given.
[2] This figure covers the period from the opening of the bridge on 16 October 1995 to 31 December 1995.

Prisoners

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners there were in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* each prison in Scotland in each year from 1990–96; and if he will make a statement. [16005]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of this question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 17 February 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the average daily prison population in each establishment from 1990.

I enclose a table which provides the information requested for the calendar years 1990–96.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*[1]1996*
Scotland[2,3]	4,723	4,838	5,256	5,636	5,583	5,624	5,861
Aberdeen	135	137	148	149	163	170	176
Barlinnie[4]	835	843	918	1,006	1,118	1,158	1,176
Castle Huntly	112	112	110	102	68	60	106
Corton Vale	133	139	155	167	172	170	176
Dumfries	125	122	133	134	127	133	141
Dungavel	129	136	126	121	113	113	94

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	[1]1996
Edinburgh	498	509	537	669	646	645	695
Friarton	62	64	67	65	74	68	69
Glenochil	528	605	605	561	504	505	550
Greenock	167	189	217	246	239	236	239
Inverness	94	101	108	111	109	110	126
Longriggend	203	164	179	180	190	185	164
Low Moss	274	294	336	355	378	359	346
Noranside	104	110	116	128	126	127	127
Penninghame	64	68	70	65	54	57	53
Perth	402	375	425	451	457	471	454
Peterhead[4]	117	128	175	208	210	201	201
Polmont	360	333	425	439	372	405	465
Shotts[4]	385	410	405	481	463	447	462
Shotts NIC	—	—	—	—	—	6	39

[1] Data for 1996 are provisional.
[2] Components may not add to totals due to rounding.
[3] Excludes those prisoners held in legalised police cells.
[4] The figures for the former Barlinnie special unit and the current Peterhead and Shotts units are included in the figures for the main establishments.

General Practitioner Practices

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioner practices there were in *(a)* each constituency in Scotland, *(b)* each region of Scotland and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each year from 1990 to 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15891]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not possible to show the information requested by constituency, as individual practices may have surgeries in more than one constituency. The available information is shown in the table. Region has been defined as health board.

Number of general medical practitioner practices by health board in Scotland: at 1 October

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	[1]1996
Scotland	*1,102*	*1,090*	*1,082*	*1,077*	*1,079*	*1,074*	*1,066*
Argyll and Clyde	108	107	106	105	105	105	103
Ayrshire and Arran	66	66	64	64	63	64	64
Borders	24	24	24	23	23	23	23
Dumfries and Galloway	36	35	35	36	36	36	36
Fife	62	62	61	61	63	63	62
Forth Valley	55	55	56	55	55	54	55
Grampian	93	91	90	90	89	89	90
Greater Glasgow	229	227	225	223	223	223	220
Highland	75	74	75	75	75	75	75
Lanarkshire	92	91	92	92	93	93	95
Lothian	139	136	137	136	136	132	128
Orkney	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Shetland	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Tayside	83	82	77	77	78	77	75
Western Isles	15	15	15	15	15	15	15

[1] Provisional.

Hospitals

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospitals there were in each region of Scotland in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1983, *(c)* 1987, *(d)* 1992 and *(e)* 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15895]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is in the table.

The changes in the number of hospitals since 1979 reflect changes in the pattern of service provision. There has been substantial investment in new and redeveloped hospitals over this period, and in some cases a single new large hospital has replaced several smaller and old hospitals. Concentration of services on a single site enables better use to be made of expensive diagnostic and treatment facilities, and offers patients access to a better standard of care and treatment.

NHS hospitals[1]—number within health board areas as at 31 March

	1979	1983	1987	1992	1996
Scotland	*344*	*334*	*306*	*283*	*269*
Argyll and Clyde	43	37	30	28	20
Ayrshire and Arran	19	19	18	15	15
Borders	15	17	16	10	9
Dumfries and Galloway	13	13	13	21	26
Fife	17	18	18	15	12

NHS hospitals[1]—number within health board areas as at 31 March

	1979	1983	1987	1992	1996
Forth Valley	13	13	13	11	16
Grampian	44	42	44	40	36
Greater Glasgow	45	44	39	35	28
Highland	24	23	21	19	20
Lanarkshire	25	24	23	22	20
Lothian	44	45	35	30	32
Orkney	2	2	2	2	2
Shetland	3	3	2	2	2
Tayside	33	29	27	28	27
Western Isles	4	5	5	5	4

[1] Hospitals open for the reception of inpatients and day cases.

Sewerage Charges

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will grant relief to domestic customers in respect of sewerage charges in 1997–98. [16607]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Yes. I have set aside £59.7 million for this purpose. This sum represents a saving to an average band D household of around £36 in 1997–98. This relief, first introduced in 1996, is a transitional arrangement which will be phased out by April 1999. We shall pay grant to water authorities to compensate for the charge income they will forgo in 1997–98. Of this, £18.2 million will be available to the East authority, £14.9 million to the North authority and £26.6 million to the West authority. The necessary order is being laid before Parliament.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 18 February 1997

TREASURY

Treasury Building (Development)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances in the Treasury building which might be affected by its planned development with Exchequer Partnership plc; and what plans he has for (i) energy efficiency and (ii) waste management schemes in the development of the building. [13637]

Mrs. Angela Knight: All known asbestos is recorded in an Asbestos Register and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health—COSHH—registers are also held. Regular health and safety inspections, audit and tours are carried out. All halon fire extinguishers have been replaced and regular checks for CFC leakage detection are carried out on relevant departmental equipment. This information is available to Exchequer Partnership plc.

So far as the redevelopment project is concerned, Exchequer Partnership will be contractually obliged to ensure that an "excellent" rating under the BREEAM system is obtained. In addition, design and construction will be carried out in accordance with all statutory authority regulations and requirements, including European legislation, statute or subordinate legislation relevant to new building and refurbishment. Exchequer Partnership plc must adhere to the Government's environmental policies.

Data Collection (Postcodes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for the collection of data and in formulas for the distribution of grants and awards; and when such usages were last reviewed. [14797]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Postcodes are used extensively by the Office for National Statistics. The Treasury and the Chancellor's other departments and agencies make no use of postcode areas.

Personal Savings

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number and proportion of households with personal equity plan savings of a value *(a)* less than £10,000, *(b)* £10,000 to £20,000, *(c)* £20,000 to £30,000 and *(d)* over £30,000. [16018]

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not available.

Investment Income

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the average amount of income tax paid by adult *(a)* pensioner and *(b)* non-pensioner taxpayers with annual investment income of (i) less than £50, (ii) £50 to £75, (iii) £75 to £100, (iv) £100 to £125, (v) £125 to £150, (vi) £150 to £175, (vii) £175 to £200, (viii) £200 to £250, (ix) £250 to £300, (x) £300 to £400, (xi) £400 to £500 and (xii) over £500 for the most recent year for which information is available. [15989]

Mr. Jack: Available estimates for 1997–98 based on projections from a mixture of statistical sources are given in the table. It is not possible to provide reliable estimates for all of the specified bands of investment income.

Range of taxable investment income for 1997–98 £	*Average amount of income tax paid*[1] *Taxpayers aged under 64* £	*Taxpayers aged 65 or over* £
1–49	2,350	900
50–99	2,450	950
100–499	3,500	1,050
Over 500	6,100	2,600

[1] Includes income tax paid on all types of income such as earned income, self employment and investment income.

British Agrochemicals Association

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings he has had with the British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the last 12 months; what was the subject of the meetings; and if he will make a statement. [16291]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have had no meetings with it in the last 12 months.

Personal Pensions (Tax Relief)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the net present cost in 1996 prices of tax relief on contributions made to appropriate personal pensions since 1988–89 assuming the social discount rate used by his Department. [13840]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* The net present cost of income tax relief for the years 1988–89 to 1995–96[1] in respect of contributions to appropriate personal pensions is given in the table, split between national insurance fund contributions and contributions above this minimum made by employees and employers. The figures are in 1996–97 prices rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion, and have been calculated using the GDP deflator and a real discount rate of 3.75 per cent. in line with that underlying the Government Actuary's report on occupational and personal pension schemes, Cm 3221.

	NIF contributions £ billion	*Employee/employer contributions £ billion*	*Total contributions £ billion*
Net present cost of income tax relief paid	2.0	2.3	4.3

[1] The cost of income tax relief for 1995–96 is provisional.

Financial Advice (Complaints)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the delay in

the investigation by the investment ombudsman and the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation of a complaint by Mr. Alan Holmes of Gullane, East Lothian, concerning compliance with IMRO rules and the terms of the Financial Services Act 1986 in relation to independent financial advice given to him by IMRO-regulated companies. [15112]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* The investment ombudsman's office has been set up by IMRO for the independent investigation of complaints about investment business brought by investors against firms regulated by IMRO. Consistent with the independent status of the ombudsman, his investigations are not subject to Government direction or supervision. The service is provided free to complainants. Before the ombudsman can investigate a complaint, he must be satisfied that it falls within his jurisdiction, and this can take time to determine with complex cases. The case to which the hon. Member refers is complicated, but the ombudsman is dealing with it as quickly as is possible.

Income Tax

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals are paid by English-based employers and work in Scotland and whose income tax is collected from their English employer. [15992]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The information is not available.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much income tax was collected by the Inland Revenue from Scottish-based employers in each of the last five years. [15932]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* During each of the years from 1992–93 onwards the following amounts of income tax and national insurance contributions have been collected under PAYE from Scottish-based employers. It is not possible to identify separately amounts of income tax and national insurance contributions.

1992–93: £6,448,442,000

1993–94: £6,865,410,000

1994–95: £7,466,284,000

1995–96: £7,984,301,000

1996–97 (to January 1997): £5,835,077,000.

Additionally, some employers will have paid income tax on the profits of their business but separate totals are not held for Scottish-based employers.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the time it would take to introduce an income tax regime to tax people where they live instead of at their employer's pay office. [15933]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The estimate sought could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of setting up an income tax regime to tax people where they live instead of at their employer's pay office. [15934]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* None.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals are paid by Scottish-based employers and work outside of Scotland and whose income tax is collected from a Scottish employer. [15991]

Mr. Jack: The information is not available.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what correspondence Her Majesty's Treasury has had with *(a)* the British Rail Board vendor unit and *(b)* bidders for subsidiary companies of the British Rail Board in respect of the surplus on the British Rail pension fund and the privatisation of subsidiary companies; and if he will make a statement. [16040]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* None.

Savings

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the average amount of savings held per household in *(a)* Post Office accounts, *(b)* tax-exempt special savings accounts, *(c)* building society accounts, *(d)* bank accounts, *(e)* other accounts, *(f)* gilts, *(g)* unit trusts, *((h)* stocks and shares, *(i)* personal equity plans, *(j)* national savings bonds, *(k)* save-as-you-earn and *(l)* premium bonds broken down by gross weekly household income divided into £100 bands. [16017]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available.

ENVIRONMENT

Wild Boar

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the change in the number of wild boar in England. [15646]

Mr. Clappison: There are no figures available on the numerical trends in wild boar in England. Licences to keep wild boar are issued by local authorities, who maintain central records.

While there have been sporadic sightings of wild boar in the wild, many of these have not been substantiated and there is no confirmed evidence of the animal breeding in the wild.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Government intend to apply the London convention's ban on sea disposal of radioactive wastes to radioactive scale on redundant oil installations; what criteria they will apply in assessing the best practicable environmental option for disposal of radioactive material from oil and gas installations; and how those criteria will differ from the criteria applied to wastes from the civil nuclear industry and radioactive military waste. [15672]

Mr. Clappison: The London convention does not prohibit the dumping at sea of wastes or other materials containing "de minimis"—exempt—levels of radioactivity.

Authorisations for the disposal of radioactive wastes are issued by the environment agencies under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. Policy on determining authorisations is set out in the White Paper *"Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy—Final Conclusions"*, Cm 2919.

Packaging Waste

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to help to minimise the effect on small businesses of the producer responsibility for packaging waste directive. [15703]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Following extensive consultation with industry on the draft packaging waste regulations, my rt hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 18 December, *Official Report*, columns *614–16*, the modifications that we propose to make in the light of the comments and proposals received.

Among the changes announced were measures to help small businesses. We are proposing a staged approach to the new system, bringing in the largest businesses first, and we have introduced a turnover element to the cut-off threshold which should assist smaller businesses in establishing whether they will be obligated under the regulations. Businesses with a turnover of £5 million or less, and who handle 50 tonnes of packaging or less, will not be obligated in the years 1997 to 1999. With effect from 1 January 2000, the small business threshold applies to those with turnover of £1 million or less or who handle 50 tonnes of packaging or less. In addition, the provision that wholesalers take the selling obligation for small retailers will take effect from 1 January 2000. These changes will mean that the number of businesses obligated in the first few years will be in the region of 4,000 rising to around 9,000 by the year 2000. This compares with a total of over 250,000 businesses who handle packaged goods.

A further measure which will help small businesses is the development of a ready reckoner or packaging catalogue to ease the collection of data and my Department has now commissioned contractors to this end.

Local Authority Receipts

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total usable receipts held by each local authority in each year since 1990. [15729]

Sir Paul Beresford: A list of the usable capital receipts held by each English local authority on 31 March of each year from 1990 to 1996 has been placed in the Library of the House.

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15913]

Sir Paul Beresford: Specific measures to protect the health and safety of young people and the relevant minimum age requirements are listed in annex 3 of the Health and Safety Commission's consultative document, "The Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1996: Proposals to implement the health and safety provisions of the EC Directive on the protection of young people at work". Copies of this document have been placed in the House of Commons Library. No other part of my Department is responsible for enforcing minimum age requirements.

Outstanding Charges (Northamptonshire)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the arrears of outstanding uncollected *(a)* domestic rates, *(b)* business rates, *(c)* community charge and *(d)* council tax for each collecting authority in Northamptonshire. [15728]

Sir Paul Beresford: Estimates of the levels of business rates, community charge and council tax arrears for individual authorities are published regularly by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

The latest information relates to the position at 31 March 1995 and is available in the "Revenue Collection Statistics 1994–95" publication in the Library. Information on the arrears of domestic rates is not available. The latest available figures for the Northamptonshire authorities and the dates to which they relate are as follow:

£000

	Estimated arrears of:		
	Business rates	*Community charges*	*Council taxes*
Corby (31 March 1995)	211	1,189	451
Daventry (31 March 1993)	475	1,663	—
East Northamptonshire	—	—	—
Kettering (31 March 1994)	390	860	463
Northampton	—	—	—
South Northamptonshire (31 March 1995)	1,092	368	205
Wellingborough (31 March 1993)	804	1,099	—

— No information has been published by CIPFA for East Northamptonshire or Northampton since community charge was abolished.

Council Tax

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which 10 local councils in England have the highest amounts of uncollected council tax; [16156]

(2) which local council in *(a)* the north-west of England and *(b)* England as a whole has the highest amount of uncollected council tax; [16163]

(3) which local council in *(a)* the north-west of England and *(b)* England as a whole has the lowest amount of uncollected council tax. [16167]

Sir Paul Beresford: Estimates of the levels of council tax arrears for individual authorities are published regularly by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The latest information relates to the position at 31 March 1995 and is available in the "Revenue Collection Statistics 1994–95" publication in the Library.

The authorities with the highest amounts of uncollected council tax in England at 31 March 1995 are as follows:

	Council tax arrears (£ million)
Lambeth	40.2
Birmingham	25.9
Manchester	[1] 21.6
Liverpool	19.3
Bristol	18.5
Camden	12.4
Newham	12.1
Leeds	11.2
Southwark	10.8
Sheffield	9.9

[1] Highest in north-west of England.

Wyre has the lowest amount of council tax arrears in the north-west of England, with a total of £0.6 million uncollected as at 31 March 1995. The Isles of Scilly has the lowest uncollected council tax in England, with a total of £6,000 uncollected as at 31 March 1995. CIPFA does not publish data for all authorities, so the figures above represent only those authorities which have supplied data.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which local council has *(a)* the north-west of England and *(b)* England has the lowest council tax rates; [16164]

(2) which local council in *(a)* the north-west of England and *(b)* England as a whole has the highest council tax rates. [16165]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is a follows:

1996–97 council tax (band D, two adults) for area of billing authority

	Lowest	*£*	*Highest*	*£*
(a) North West	Halton	647	Liverpool	1,006
(b) England	Westminster	295	Liverpool	1,006

Willenhall Shopping Precinct

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress with the development of the Willenhall shopping precinct. [15597]

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand that Bellways Homes Ltd. and English Partnerships are likely to reach agreement this month on the amount of grant required to enable the redevelopment of the Willenhall shopping precinct to proceed.

Household Growth

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has received as part of the consultative process on his Department's Green paper, "Household Growth; Where will we Live," in respect of the imposition of time limits on the period of time for which a developer may retain derelict urban land. [16043]

Mr. Clappison: The consultation period on the Green Paper ends on 17 March. None of the responses received to date has specifically covered this issue.

Mr. Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of new households formed between the current date and 2016 will be occupied by people living alone. [16044]

Mr. Clappison: The projected number of households in England at mid-year in 2016 is 23,598,000 a net increase of 3,421,000 on the projected number at mid year 1996. Of this net increase 2,753,000 households or 80 per cent. are projected to be one-person households where a one-person household is defined as someone living alone who does not share either housekeeping or a living room with anyone else.

Mr. Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of new housing was built on urban or brown field sites in *(a)* the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available and *(b)* the previous 12-month period. [16045]

Sir Paul Beresford: The latest year for which figures are available is 1993. In that year 49 per cent. of new residential development in England was on land that had been previously developed for urban uses. In the previous year the proportion was 47 per cent. These figures were published in the Department's "Land Use Change in England Statistical Bulletin" last year. A new edition of this bulletin, with figures for 1994, will be published in May this year.

Mr. Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of cohabiting new households, expressed as a percentage of total new projected households, his Department predicts for the years *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2008 and *(c)* 2016, respectively. [16330]

Mr. Clappison: The net increases in the number of households headed by a cohabiting couple in England at mid-year 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016 are projected to be 70,000, 122,000, 172,000 and 202,000 higher respectively than those at mid-year 1996, representing 8 per cent., 7 per cent., 7 per cent. and 6 per cent respectively of the net total new households projections on the same basis for these years.

Show Houses (Taxation)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what recent representations he has received concerning the taxation of show houses for local government purposes; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement; [16204]

(2) what is his policy on the taxation of show houses; and if he will make a statement. [16205]

Sir Paul Beresford: Show houses are liable for non-domestic rates. We have received representations from the House Builders Federation and the Manufacturing and Construction Alliance that show houses should, instead, be subject to the council tax. We have agreed to meet both organisations to discuss this matter.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) at which meetings of the Building Research Establishment management board, held *(a)* prior

to 8 December 1996, *(b)* between 8 and 20 December 1996 and *(c)* since 20 December 1996, members of his Department's BRE privatisation team were present; [16490]

(2) at which meetings of the Building Research Establishment management board held *(a)* prior to 8 December 1996, *(b)* between 8 and 20 December 1996 and *(c)* since 20 December 1996 members of the in-house bid team were present; [16491]

(3) which members of the Building Research Establishment management board are also members of the in-house bid team; [16492]

(4) if he will list the meetings of the Building Research Establishment management board which were attended by members of his Department's BRE privatisation team at which members of the BRE management board who were also involved in the BRE in-house bid team were present. [16541]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: All members of the BRE management board are members of the management bid team. Since the management bid team was authorised to enter the competition for the purchase of BRE, a member of the team of officials established by the Department to transfer BRE to the private sector has attended each meeting of the BRE management board. The meetings were held on 25 November 1996, 20 December 1996 and 27 January 1997.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the occasions during the past three years on which Ministers have met members of the staff of the Building Research Establishment, the names of all those who attended the meetings and the subjects discussed on each occasion. [16493]

Mr. Jones: In the past three years, Ministers have visited the Building Research Establishment for the following occasions:

Minister for Housing and Planning, 16 May 1994, to open the Conseil International de Bâtiment international conference on the environment.

Minister for Construction and Planning, 5 February 1996, to see the first use of recycled aggregate in the foundations of the new energy efficiency building.

Minister for Construction and Planning, 12 June 1996, to seal a time capsule in the new building and to open the new Burn hall.

Ministers have paid routine visits to BRE, to see at first hand the work BRE does, as follows:

Secretary of State for the Environment, 17 June 1994

Minister for Construction and Planning, 30 March 1995

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), 13 September 1996.

The Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for Construction and Planning attended opening events to mark the BRE's 75th anniversary in London on 13 May 1996, and the Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), attended the closing events in Glasgow on 3 October 1996.

On these occasions the Ministers took the opportunity to discuss operations across the establishment with a range of staff. Additionally, Ministers meet members of staff from time to time in the course of normal departmental business, and at meetings, seminars and other functions organised by the construction industry and other interests.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received about the possibility of the Building Research Establishment in-house bid team *(a)* having access to more information than the external bidders and *(b)* being treated in a different way to the external bidder in relation to meetings with other interested parties. [16489]

Mr. Jones: None. The Department has taken all reasonable steps to ensure a level playing field between all bidders.

Environment Agency (Prosecutions)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the prosecutions carried out in England and Wales by the Environment Agency for water quality and integrated pollution control offences, in each month since October 1996 indicating *(a)* the person or company prosecuted, *(b)* the date and outcome of the prosecution, *(c)* the nature of the offence and *(d)* the penalty imposed. [15670]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* I have arranged for the relevant details of prosecutions carried out by the Environment Agency for water pollution and integrated pollution control offences for the period October 1996 to January 1997 to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Beef Waste

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *101*, if he will list the locations of the *(a)* incinerators and *(b)* tyre-burning plant tested for emissions in respect of the burning of cattle carcases; and if he will reconcile the figures for the total number of incineration plants set out in his answer and in the answer from the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *145–46*. [16249]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The incinerators are: Rechem, Fawley, Hampshire; Rechem, Pontypool, Gwent; Yorkshire Environmental, Knostrop, Leeds; Yorkshire Environmental, Ashford, Kent; Vetspeed, Royston, Herts. The tyre burning plant is Elm Energy, Wolverhampton.

The answers given by me and by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture on 11 February related to the questions asked. The Prosper de Mulder rendering plant at Widnes is the subject of an air pollution authorisation from the local authority, Halton borough council. Emissions testing has taken place. The incinerator at Vetspeed, Royston, burns cattle carcases, not rendered remains. The trial incineration of tannery waste at Pontypool, Knostrop, Ashford and Wolverhampton was listed in my reply for completeness, although rendering of tannery waste is not a process which meets the definition of rendering in the Animal By-Products Order 1992 and these incinerators were not, therefore, included in my hon. Friend's reply.

Waste Disposal at Sea

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions and on what dates have taken place between his Department, MAFF and the DTI regarding *(a)* a common definition of bulky waste and *(b)* a policy for its disposal at sea; [15629]

(2) what is his Department's definition of bulky waste in respect of disposal of waste at sea; [15628]

(3) what assessment his Department has made of potential disposal sites for bulky wastes at sea; and if he will place in the Library copies of *(a)* studies evaluated by his Department and *(b)* correspondence between his Department and other bodies on this subject. [15647]

Mr. Boswell: I have been asked to reply.

The London convention of 1972 on dumping of waste at sea refers to containers, scrap metal and other bulky wastes liable to sink to the sea bottom which may present a serious obstacle to fishing or navigation.

The protocol to the London convention, agreed in November last year, describes bulky wastes as items primarily comprising iron, steel, concrete and similarly unharmful materials for which the primary concern is physical impact.

The Ospar convention, which will shortly supersede the Oslo convention and whose more stringent controls on dumping at sea are already applied to UK waters, does not refer to bulky wastes. Under Ospar the dumping of all wastes or other matter is prohibited except for specified categories which include inert materials of natural origin—for example, rock—and vessels and aircraft until 2004; offshore installations and pipelines may also be considered for disposal. Each case is considered on its merits and it is UK policy to license disposal at sea only when there is no safe and practicable alternative. The only assessment so far undertaken of potential disposal sites at sea for a bulky waste was conducted by the Scottish Office in relation to the Brent Spar. All the studies included in that assessment have already been placed in the Library.

Details of the interdepartmental discussions on this topic could be derived only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what procedure his Department follows in determining best practicable environmental options; and what criteria govern the disposal of bulky wastes at sea, in the case of *(a)* redundant oil and gas installations, *(b)* radioactive wastes and *(c)* other wastes; [15649]

(2) what are the interdepartmental co-ordination and consultation mechanisms used in determining the best practicable environmental options for disposing of bulky wastes at sea, in the case of *(a)* redundant oil and gas installations, *(b)* radioactive wastes and *(c)* other wastes; and by what means public opinion is taken into account. [15653]

Mr. Boswell: I have been asked to reply.

The dumping of waste at sea is subject to the provisions of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 and the UK has agreed to abide by guidelines and assessment procedures adopted under relevant international conventions.

In particular, we apply annex 11 to the recently agreed protocol to the London convention which sets out the considerations that need to be taken into account when conducting an assessment of wastes that may be considered for dumping at sea. These include whether appropriate opportunities exist to re-use, recycle or treat the waste without undue risks to human health or the environment or disproportionate costs; the chemical, physical and biological properties of the waste; the suitability of the proposed dump site; and potential effects on the environment.

Other Departments and the conservation agencies are consulted on such assessments as appropriate on a case by case basis. In relation to the decommissioning of oil and gas installations, which is the responsibility the Department of Trade and Industry, a wide range of fisheries, amenity and environmental interests are consulted.

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* for each unitary council and *(b)* for Wales in 1997 prices for the financial years 1996–97 and 1997–98 the *(a)* standard spending assessment, *(b)* capping limit for spending and *(c)* spending on care in the community, indicating the percentage change in each case. [15339]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Table 1 gives the standard spending assessments and table 2 the capping limits on spending for 1996–97 and 1997–98 at constant 1997–98 prices. No adjustments have been made for changes in local authority funding arrangements between 1996–97 and 1997–98.

Outturn expenditure figures for care in the community are not centrally available. Identified allocations for care in the community within authorities standard spending assessments for 1996–97 and 1997–98, at constant 1997–98 prices, are shown in table 3.

Table 1: Standard spending assessments

Council	*1997–98 (£000)*	*'1996–97 (£000)*	*Change (£000)*	*Percentage change*
Blaenau Gwent	65,269	65,786	–517	–0.8
Bridgend	110,865	109,739	1,125	1.0
Caerphilly	147,190	147,213	–23	0.0
Cardiff	250,773	249,935	839	0.3
Carmarthenshire	151,724	151,325	399	0.3
Ceredigion	61,527	61,113	413	0.7
Conwy	92,824	91,849	975	1.1
Denbighshire	79,476	80,126	–650	–0.8
Flintshire	115,628	114,810	819	0.7
Gwynedd	109,516	108,531	985	0.9
Isle of Anglesey	61,760	62,018	–258	–0.4
Merthyr Tydfil	56584	56,976	–393	–0.7
Monmouthshire	65,860	65,325	535	0.8
Neath Port Talbot	122,316	122,860	–544	–0.4
Newport	118,639	119,867	–1,228	–1.0
Pembrokeshire	101,848	102,438	–590	–0.6
Powys	119,200	117,962	1,239	1.1
Rhondda, Cynon Taff	212,409	211,228	1,181	0.6
Swansea	196,438	197,414	–976	–0.5
Torfaen	79,336	79,352	–17	0.0

Table 1: Standard spending assessments

Council	1997–98 (£000)	[1]1996–97 (£000)	Change (£000)	Percentage change
The Vale of Glamorgan	95,846	96,526	–680	–0.7
Wrexham	100,625	100,529	96	0.1
All councils	2,515,652	2,512,922	2,730	0.1

[1] 1996–97 local government revenue settlement estimated at 1997–98 prices.

Table 2: Capping limits on spending

Council	1997–98 (£000)	[1]1996–97 (£000)	Change (£000)	Percentage change
Blaenau Gwent	71,106	70,955	151	0.2
Bridgend	117,264	116,250	1,015	0.9
Caerphilly	154,611	154,447	164	0.1
Cardiff	261,849	261,232	617	0.2
Carmarthenshire	159,313	158,311	1,002	0.6
Ceredigion	67,642	67,394	248	0.4
Conwy	92,824	91,849	975	1.1
Denbighshire	84,344	85,145	–801	–0.9
Flintshire	120,836	120,120	716	0.6
Gwynedd	114,524	113,639	884	0.8
Isle of Anglesey	62,582	62,313	269	0.4
Merthyr Tydfil	60,122	59,966	156	0.3
Monmouthshire	65,860	65,325	535	0.8
Neath Port Talbot	132,996	132,365	631	0.5
Newport	120,000	119,867	134	0.1
Pembrokeshire	103,921	103,553	367	0.4
Powys	120,411	119,196	1,215	1.0
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	228,967	228,261	706	0.3
Swansea	203,116	202,013	1,103	0.5
Torfaen	81,389	81,256	132	0.2
The Vale of Glamorgan	97,404	97,452	–48	0.0
Wrexham	105,055	103,414	1,641	1.6
All councils	2,626,136	2,614,325	11,812	0.5

[1] 1996–97 local government revenue settlement estimated at 1997–98 prices.

Table 3: Allocations within total standard spending assessments in respect of care in the community

Council	1997–98 (£000)	[1]1996–97 (£000)	Change (£000)	Percentage change
Blaenau Gwent	4,240	3,831	409	10.7
Bridgend	7,276	6,526	750	11.5
Caerphilly	9,148	8,242	905	11.0
Cardiff	15,991	14,385	1,606	11.2
Carmarthenshire	11,142	10,031	1,111	11.1
Ceredigion	4,258	3,826	432	11.3
Conwy	7,326	6,611	715	10.8
Denbighshire	5,792	5,271	521	9.9
Flintshire	7,257	6,518	740	11.4
Gwynedd	7,704	6,937	767	11.1
Isle of Anglesey	3,987	3,679	309	8.4
Merthyr Tydfil	3,821	3,480	342	9.8
Monmouthshire	4,540	4,018	522	13.0
Neath Port Talbot	8,909	7,946	963	12.1
Newport	7,356	6,681	675	10.1
Pembrokeshire	6,353	5,706	647	11.3
Powys	7,548	6,818	730	10.7
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	15,553	14,016	1,538	11.0
Swansea	13,596	12,328	1,268	10.3
Torfaen	4,627	4,167	459	11.0
The Vale of Glamorgan	5,993	5,468	525	9.6
Wrexham	6,793	6,080	713	11.7
All councils	169,209	152,562	16,647	10.9

[1] 1996–97 local government revenue settlement estimated at 1997–98 prices.

Teachers (Redundancy)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to introduce to reduce the number of teacher redundancies. [15834]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Local education authorities and schools are responsible for decisions relating to the employment and deployment of individual schools teachers. The local authority settlement announced recently should enable those local authorities who attach the same high priority to education as my right hon. Friend and I to have sufficient resources to meet the needs of schools.

Health Authorities (Allocation of Resources)

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has reached a decision concerning the allocation of resources to health authorities in Wales for 1997–98. [16854]

Mr. Hague: I announced on 12 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *405–09*, that I shall be providing an additional £94 million for the NHS in Wales in 1997–98. This will bring total spending to £2,368 million; £1,658 million of this will fund the hospital, community and family health service.

Within this amount, the five health authorities, general practitioners and general practitioner fundholders will receive revenue funding of £1,505 million, £52 million or 3.5 per cent. more than in 1996–97 plans. In real terms, this is an overall increase of 1.5 per cent. Within these resources, I have been able to give health authorities £49 million, which represents a 3.5 per cent. cash increase on discretionary purchasing power, and £3 million to cash limited general medical services, which is a 5.6 per cent. cash increase.

I am expecting health authorities and trusts to continue to generate efficiency savings and in 1997–98 these should amount to at least 2.7 per cent. This will release some £40 million which, together with the new money, will be available to meet inflationary and other pressures, and to increase investment in patient care.

Health authorities and trusts will also receive £105 million to fund capital development. Included with this is some £9 million of new provision in order to fund the package of urgently needed capital development that I set out in my budget statement. The rationalisation of services between the Cardiff royal infirmary and the university hospital of Wales, the new link road to the hospital site and work on the new cancer centre in north Wales can now begin next year. These developments complement the capital schemes worth £40 million that are currently subject to the private finance initiative and I fully expect to see some successful outcomes in 1997–98. The private finance initiative offers a unique opportunity to bring forward capital developments which are funded outside public expenditure.

Officials have today informed health authorities and trusts of the provisional allocations to health authorities and trusts' external financing limits. I have placed a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Primary Schools (Hillingdon)

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the relationship between the level of funding and education standards in maintained primary schools in the London borough of Hillingdon. [16235]

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the relationship between the level of funding and education standards in maintained primary schools in the London borough of Hillingdon. [16237]

Mr. Robin Squire: There is no simple relationship between levels of funding and education standards.

Further Education

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will take steps to assist further education colleges running operating deficits to restore their financial health without jeopardising the quality and scope of the education offered. [16102]

Mr. Paice: Colleges are independent, autonomous bodies and are responsible for managing their own financial affairs. The Further Education Funding Council has effective arrangements in place for identifying colleges in financial difficulty and for working with them to recover their financial health.

School Computers

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the ratio of computers to secondary school pupils in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the United States of America and *(c)* Japan in the last five years for which figures are available. [16143]

Mr. Robin Squire: Comparative data are not readily available. A recent international report by Research Machines on information technology provision in schools, covering countries in the group of 7, indicated that in 1996 the ratio of computers to secondary school pupils in the United Kingdom was one per 8.5 pupils, in the United States of America one per 12 pupils and in Japan about one per 25 pupils.

School Inspections

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools by local education authority have been deemed by Office for Standards in Education inspectors to be failing to provide a satisfactory standard of education. [16171]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested on the 243 failing schools, as at 31 January 1997, is given in the following table. In addition, I have placed in the Library a coloured map containing the same information.

For completeness, I should add that 18 schools have already been restored to health as a result of the special measures policy and 12 have closed.

LEA	*Number of schools*
Corporation of London	0
Camden	1
Greenwich	3
Hackney	5
Hammersmith and Fulham	1
Islington	2
Kensington and Chelsea	0
Lambeth	11
Lewisham	4
Southwark	4
Tower Hamlets	1
Wandsworth	3
Westminster	1
Barking	0
Barnet	0
Bexley	0
Brent	4
Bromley	1
Croydon	4
Ealing	0
Enfield	1
Haringey	2
Harrow	0
Havering	1
Hillingdon	0
Hounslow	1
Kingston	0
Merton	0
Newham	3
Redbridge	0
Richmond	0
Sutton	2
Waltham Forest	6
Birmingham	6
Coventry	1
Dudley	0
Sandwell	3
Solihull	1
Walsall	3
Wolverhampton	2
Knowsley	0
Liverpool	6
St. Helens	0
Sefton	0
Wirral	1
Bolton	1
Bury	1
Manchester	4
Oldham	1
Rochdale	2
Salford	2
Stockport	1
Tameside	0
Trafford	0
Wigan	1
Barnsley	0
Doncaster	0
Rotherham	0
Sheffield	5
	102
Bradford	8
Calderdale	1
Kirklees	3
Leeds	6
Wakefield	0
Gateshead	1
Newcastle	3
North Tyneside	0
South Tyneside	0
Sunderland	1
Bath and North East Somerset	0

LEA	Number of schools
City of Bristol	0
North Somerset	1
South Gloucestershire	0
Hartlepool	0
Middlesborough	1
Redcar	0
Stockton	1
Hull	5
East Riding	0
North East Lincolnshire	0
North Lincolnshire	0
North Yorkshire	0
York	0
Bedfordshire	1
Berkshire	3
Buckinghamshire	2
Cambridgeshire	3
Cheshire	0
Cornwall	1
Cumbria	3
Derbyshire	1
Devon	3
Dorset	1
Durham	0
East Sussex	2
Essex	6
Gloucestershire	3
Hampshire	3
Hereford and Worcester	2
Hertfordshire	5
Isle of Wight	0
Kent	4
Lancashire	14
Leicestershire	8
Lincolnshire	2
Norfolk	8
Northants	1
Northumberland	1
Nottinghamshire	7
Oxfordshire	4
Shropshire	2
Somerset	1
Staffordshire	5
Suffolk	0
Surrey	1
Warwickshire	1
West Sussex	0
Wiltshire	2
	131

1. Independent
Colbrook Independent Special School, Shropshire. Talbot Independent Special School, Northumberland.

2. GM Schools
Southfields Secondary, Kent 1.
St Hugh's Secondary, Lincolnshire 1.
Upbury Manor Secondary, Kent 1.
Aston St. Peters Primary, Bedfordshire 1.
Our Lady of Fatima Sec, Liverpool 1.
Kelsey Park Secondary School, Bromley 1.
St. Margaret's Special School, Bedfordshire 1.
Hayes Manor Secondary School, Hillingdon 1.

Special Needs

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children of school age, who are the subjects of statements of special educational needs, are being educated in *(a)* private schools specialising in such children, *(b)* maintained special schools, *(c)* special units within maintained schools and *(d)* mainstream classes in maintained schools. [16438]

Mrs. Gillan: Schools' returns to the Department showed that in January 1996, 4,992 pupils with statements were educated in non-maintained special schools, 5,810 in independent schools, 87,458 in maintained special schools, 1,826 in pupil referral units, and 127,238 in maintained nursery, primary or secondary schools. Information on whether pupils with statements in mainstream schools are taught in general classes or separately is not collected centrally.

Mr. Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls of school age are the subjects of statements of special educational needs; and how many of these have (i) special learning difficulties and (ii) behavioural problems. [16435]

Mrs. Gillan: Schools' returns to the Department showed that in January 1996 a total of 227,324 pupils had statements. Information by gender, or by type of special educational need, is not collected centrally.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the number and the proportion of eligible parents who have *(a)* received a voucher application form and *(b)* returned a voucher application from, in respect of provision for their four-year-old in the summer term 1997. [15958]

Mr. Robin Squire: The parents/carers of 653,746 eligible children have been sent an application form. Of those, as of 12 February 1997, a total of 511,780—more than 78 per cent.—had returned their forms to the nursery voucher centre.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received from providers in the four areas piloting the nursery voucher scheme, regarding the impact of the voucher scheme on provision for three-year-olds. [15960]

Mr. Squire: My right hon. Friend has received representations on a number of aspects of the nursery voucher scheme, including the desirability of extending the scheme to three-year-olds. As the deduction from each local education authority's standard spending assessment is only in respect of existing places for four-year-olds, it should not impact on the provision for three-year-olds.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places for voucher-bearing four-year-olds were provided in *(a)* the maintained sector, *(b)* the voluntary sector, *(c)* the private sector and *(d)* overall in (i) the first term and (ii) the second term of the nursery voucher pilot scheme. [15955]

Mr. Squire: The table provides a breakdown of the number of places provided under the voucher scheme by type of provider for each of the phase 1 local education authority areas in the summer and autumn terms of 1996.

Number of places provided in the summer and autumn terms

	Norfolk	Kensington and Chelsea	Wandsworth	Westminster	Total
Summer term					
Private and voluntary sectors	3,656	248	448	168	4,520
Independent schools	222	148	197	92	659
Grant-maintained schools	158	40	71	0	269
Local authority day nurseries	0	40	35	49	124
Special schools	21	0	4	0	25
LEA-maintained schools	4,274	600	2,043	832	7,749
Total	8,331	1,076	2,798	1,141	13,346
Autumn term					
Private and voluntary sectors	773	123	127	120	1,143
Independent schools	206	269	347	113	935
Grant-maintained schools	344	45	232	0	621
Local authority day nurseries	0	23	6	29	58
Special schools	18	0	8	0	26
LEA-maintained schools	7,548	621	2,040	886	11,095
Total	8,889	1,081	2,760	1,148	13,878

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when parents of four-year-olds will receive a nursery voucher in respect of provision in the summer term 1997. [15957]

Mr. Squire: The first tranche of nursery education vouchers will arrive with parents from 24 February 1997. Thereafter vouchers will be issued to parents on receipt of a correctly completed application form.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish the chief inspector's report on the findings of the inspections carried out up to the end of November, in the pilot phase of the nursery voucher scheme. [15959]

Mr. Squire: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has published today the chief inspector's overview report on the findings of inspections carried out in the local authority areas participating in phase 1 of the nursery education voucher scheme.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her current estimate of the number and percentage of parents in the four areas piloting the nursery voucher scheme who have seen or heard advertising for the scheme. [15953]

Mr. Squire: Research undertaken in March 1996 among a sample of the 16,000 eligible parents in the four phase 1 participating authorities showed that, overall, some 38 per cent. claimed to have seen or heard some advertising for the nursery education voucher scheme. The figure rose to 48 per cent. in Norfolk. Given that publicity had to be contained within the participating authorities, this is a very respectable figure.

No subsequent research of this nature has been undertaken, but it seems reasonable to conclude that with the advent of national advertising for phase 2 a greater proportion of parents in the four phase 1 areas are now aware of the scheme.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many vouchers have been *(a)* issued and *(b)* redeemed in respect of (i) term one and (ii) term two of the nursery voucher scheme; and what is the cash value of unredeemed vouchers; [15954]

(2) in respect of each of the four nursery voucher pilot areas *(a)* what is the number of eligible four-year-olds, *(b)* how many applied for a voucher and *(c)* how many redeemed a voucher in (i) the first term and (ii) the second term, of the pilot phase. [15956]

Mr. Squire: The following table provides a breakdown of the estimated number of children eligible for a voucher, and the number of vouchers issued and redeemed for each of the phase 1 local education authority areas in the summer and autumn terms 1996. Unredeemed vouchers do not have a cash value; they represent the potential grant that would have been paid had they been redeemed.

Voucher redemption in summer and autumn terms

	Norfolk	Kensington and Chelsea	Wandsworth	Westminster
Summer term 1996				
Estimated children	9,300	1,650	3,300	1,900
Vouchers issued	8,914	1,140	3,123	1,395
Vouchers redeemed (full or part)	8,331	1,076	2,798	1,141
Nominal value of unredeemed voucher parts	£526,251	£28,859	£141,913	£107,589
Autumn term 1996				
Estimated children	9,300	1,650	3,300	1,900
Vouchers issued	9,128	1,142	3,147	1,469
Vouchers redeemed (full or part)	8,889	1,081	2,760	1,148
Nominal value of unredeemed vouchers parts	£177,960	£35,570	£174,403	£142,463

Grant-maintained Status Applications

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the timetable which governs the process of application for grant-maintained status if a board of school governors recommends that such status should be sought. [16252]

Mr. Forth: If the governing body of a school passes a resolution to ballot parents on grant-maintained status, or if it receives a valid petition from parents, it must hold a ballot within 10 weeks. If a majority of those parents who vote are in favour of GM status, the governing body must publish, within four months of the ballot result, statutory proposals for acquiring GM status. There is then a period of two months during which objections to those proposals may be made. My right hon. Friend decides the proposals, taking account of any objections, as soon as possible thereafter.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the number of schools likely to apply for grant-maintained status within the next six months; and if she will make a statement. [16254]

Mr. Forth: There are currently some 50 schools which have published statutory proposals to become grant maintained following a yes vote in parental ballots, and nine more are in the process of balloting parents. Beyond that, the number of schools applying for grant-maintained status depends on parental choice and we do not try to predict it.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools have begun the process of seeking grant-maintained status; in how many of those cases parents voted by a sufficient majority in favour of acquiring such status; in how many of the cases of such affirmative votes applications have so far been received by his Department; in how many of those cases of applications received such status (i) was approved, (ii) was denied and (iii) is still pending; and if she will make a statement. [16251]

Mr. Forth: The GM process starts when a school decides to ballot parents on applying for GM status. If parents vote yes, the school publishes statutory proposals to become a grant-maintained school. These are considered by the Secretary of State, who may approve or reject them. The following table gives details of ballots and their outcomes in England since GM legislation was first introduced in 1988.

	(a) Primary	*(b) Secondary*
Number of schools holding ballots	764	944
Yes votes by parents	566	702
Statutory proposals published	561	701
Statutory proposals approved by Secretary of State	494	654
Statutory proposals rejected by Secretary of State	50	39
Statutory proposals under consideration	17	8

Figures exclude special schools and schools established by promoters. Where schools have held more than one ballot, only the outcome of the latest has been included. Where schools have published proposals more than once, only the latest decision has been counted.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the grounds upon which an application by a school for grant-maintained status could be refused by the Secretary of State; and in what circumstances under the relevant Act the Secretary of State could defer a decision. [16253]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend considers each application for grant-maintained status on its merits and in the light of the relevant circumstances. The reasons for any decision not to approve GM statutory proposals therefore vary from case to case. The legislation does not make provision for the deferral of decisions on GM applications.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people after claiming jobseeker's allowance for a period of 13 weeks have taken *(a)* part-time employment of less than 25 hours, *(b)* temporary employment of less than (i) six months and (ii) 12 months and *(c)* employment paying less than £3 per hour in each month since 7 October 1996. [16125]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 18 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding the number of people who, after claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for a period of 13 weeks, have taken (a) part-time employment of less than 25 hours, (b) temporary employment of less than (i) 6 months and (ii) 12 months and (c) employment paying less than £3 per hour in each month since 7th October 1996.

Unfortunately, I cannot provide the information you request as it is not available. The reasons for this are:

- the Employment Service records employment details where jobseekers have been placed into vacancies advertised through Jobcentres, but no details are available for jobseekers finding employment through alternative means. Therefore I cannot identify total numbers for any of the categories you have requested;
- when details of vacancies are taken by the Jobcentre, an indicator is set if the vacancy is temporary but the period of temporary work is not specified;
- vacancies taken by the Jobcentre are classified as part time if the vacancy offers up to 30 hours work per week, but no differentiation is made between part time vacancies on the basis of the number of hours;
- in general, Jobcentres record the average weekly earnings rather than the hourly rate.

Although the information you have requested is not available, you may find it useful to refer to the Labour Market Trends publication produced by the Office for National Statistics, which provides further Labour Market analysis.

I am sorry that I cannot be more helpful.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many people have been subject to benefit disqualification as a result of *(a)* breaking the labour market conditions, *(b)* failing to complete the jobseeker's allowance agreement, *(c)* refusing to attend mandatory training courses and *(d)* failing to act on the jobseeker's direction in each month since 7 October 1996; [16126]

(2) how many people have been subject to benefit disqualification for refusing to accept a job offer notified by the Employment Service in each month since October 1996. [16127]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 18 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about how many people in each month since October 1996 have been subjected to benefit disqualification as a result of breaking the labour market conditions, failing to complete the jobseeker's allowance agreement, refusing to attend mandatory training courses, failing to act on the jobseeker's direction, and refusing to accept a job offer notified by the Employment Service. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately information is not available in the form you have requested. The information is not available on a monthly basis but statistics are compiled quarterly. Information about decisions on questions arising on claims for unemployment benefit is contained in a document entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officer's Decisions", which is published quarterly, and includes information on all the main entitlement questions arising on claims.

The publication for the quarter ending 31 December 1996 will also include decisions given on questions arising on claims for Jobseeker's Allowance. All the main questions will be shown separately, including those relating to the areas referred to above. I expect to publish this analysis by the end of March 1997 and copies will be placed in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *466*, what level of TEC reserves is available for discretionary expenditure. [16856]

Mr. Paice: The information provided by training and enterprise councils in England about the level of reserves shown in their statutory accounts for 1995–96 show that the total of £260 million comprised £51 million for investment in capital assets, £86 million for working capital and £123 million for discretionary expenditure. Of the sum available for discretionary expenditure, £102 million was earmarked for planned expenditure in 1996–97 and beyond for economic regeneration and other purposes in line with their corporate and business plans.

Unemployment

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and which United Kingdom constituencies have higher unemployment rates than *(a)* Germany and *(b)* France. [15673]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Dennis Roberts to Mr. Peter Bottomley dated 18 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked the director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question on those parliamentary constituencies with a higher rate of unemployment than Germany and France. The Director has asked me to reply in his absence.

Unemployment rates by Parliamentary Constituency are not available for either the claimant count or the internationally comparable ILO measure of unemployment derived from the Labour Force Survey.

DEFENCE

Publicity Material (Languages)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many items of publicity material are produced by his Department in the Urdu language. [14850]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *5*. Details of any other material produced by my Department in the Urdu language are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14954]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information is not available in the form requested by my hon. Friend. However, my Department publishes data on the destination of MOD equipment expenditure on an annual basis in "UK Defence Statistics". Table 1.9 shows expenditure in each of the standard UK regions. A copy of the latest "UK Defence Statistics" is in the Library of the House. Data are not available at a lower level than that published. My hon. Friend may wish to know, however, that my Department has placed over 550 contracts in the Bournemouth area over the last 12 months worth in total in the region of £40 million.

Suicides (Armed Services)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many suicides there have been in each of the armed services in each year since 1990. [15387]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 12 February 1997]:* The number of coroner verdicts of suicide in each of the armed services, including Gurkhas[1], for each year since 1990 are:

Year	*Navy*	*Army*[1]	*RAF*	*Total*
1990	8	20	14	42
1991	5	22	7	34
1992	6	19	5	30
1993	1	18	4	23
1994	6	18	5	29
1995	1	15	2	18
1996	2	3	0	5
1997	0	0	0	0

Information in the table as at 10 February 1997.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of *(a)* energy use and *(b)* waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16423]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This answer can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Royal Yacht

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the role of *(a)* the Department of Trade and Industry, *(b)* the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and *(c)* the Department of Education and Employment in the design consultations on the replacement for the royal yacht Britannia. [15736]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In view of the trade promotion and representational roles of the royal yacht, officials from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will assist the Ministry of Defence in developing the specification for the new vessel. No Department for Education and Employment participation is currently planned.

Sensorineural Hearing Loss

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations his Department has had with the Department of Social Security in relation to replies to parliamentary questions from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, on the subject of sensorineural hearing loss and war pensions. [15860]

Mr. Soames: The administration of the war pension scheme is a matter for the Department of Social Security. On medical matters, the legislation governing that scheme requires the War Pensions Agency to take the advice of a medical advisor appointed by the Secretary of State for that Department. My Department has no part to play in this process; consequently, there has been no need for consultation.

Eskmeals and Shoeburyness Ranges

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what steps have been taken in recent years to reduce the fixed costs of the ranges at *(a)* Eskmeals and *(b)* Shoeburyness; [16479]

(2) what are the fixed costs to the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency of providing the ranges at *(a)* Eskmeals and *(b)* Shoeburyness. [16480]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 18 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your questions about the fixed costs of running the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) ranges at Eskmeals and Shoeburyness, and the steps which have been taken to reduce them, since as Chief Executive of DERA, this is a matter for which I am responsible. I will reply to both questions in this letter.

The fixed costs of providing accommodation, estate management, security, communications infrastructure and site management, during 1997/8, are expected to be:

Shoeburyness: £6,397,000

Eskmeals: £2,138,000

This cost is before the provision of any staff or costs directly associated with the provision of any staff or costs directly associated with the provision or support of trials capabilities.

Both ranges have taken steps to reduce their fixed costs. At Eskmeals, savings have been achieved by reducing the numbers of staff, rationalising working practices and reviewing property and estate practices. Similarly, staffing levels and maintenance programmes have been reduced at Shoeburyness. Changes have also been made to the way in which work is done, including the contractorisation of works services.

I hope this is helpful.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the test and evaluation work of *(a)* Eskmeals range and *(b)* Shoeburyness range is devoted to (i) new weapon procurement and (ii) equipment improvement programmes to enhance existing defence systems. [16481]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 18 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the nature of the work done in support of the Ministry of Defence's equipment procurement programme at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) ranges at Eskmeals and Shoeburyness, since as Chief Executive of DERA, this is a matter for which I am responsible.

Work on the Eskmeals range is divided in broadly equal parts between new equipment procurement and equipment improvement programmes. At Shoeburyness, typically half of the tasks undertaken involves the proof testing of weapons and munitions. The remainder of the work is in support of new equipment procurement or improvement programmes, but on both ranges the precise balance varies from year to year.

I hope this is helpful.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the staff complements of *(a)* Eskmeals range and *(b)* Shoeburyness range in each of the past five years in each of the categories (i) contractors, (ii) civil servants and (iii) military staff. [16478]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 18 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the staff complements of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) ranges at Eskmeals and Shoeburyness, since as Chief Executive of DERA, this is a matter for which I am responsible.

The number of staff working on the ranges, as at 1 April in each of the last 5 years was as follows:

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Eskmeals					
Civil servants	65	65	63	56	56
Military	12	12	11	9	8
Contractors	174	173	170	148	140
Shoeburyness					
Civil servants	83	83	79	77	68
Military	24	24	21	21	18
Contractors	400	388	399	380	343

I hope this is helpful.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what facilities are available at the Eskmeals range that are not available at other ranges of his Department; [16488]

(2) what proportion of the work of the Shoeburyness range involves overwater recovery; and at what other range facilities in the United Kingdom or overseas this work could take place. [16477]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 18 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your questions about the facilities and capabilities at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) ranges at Eskmeals and Shoeburyness and their availability at other ranges, since as Chief Executive of DERA, this is a matter for which I am responsible. I will respond to both of these questions in this letter.

Although none of the facilities currently available at Eskmeals is directly replicated elsewhere, it would technically be feasible to provide all but one of the capabilities offered by the range on other sites. The firing of ammunition incorporating Depleted Uranium in a contained environment cannot be conducted on any other Ministry of Defence range in the United Kingdom.

During the current year, over water recovery is forecast to account for some 5% by value of all work undertaken at Shoeburyness. I am only aware of one other facility, in Australia, at which it is possible to carry out comparable over water recovery.

I hope this is helpful.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the charges for the use of the Eskmeals and Shoeburyness ranges are set at a level commensurate with recovering the costs of operating those facilities; [16482]

(2) what increases in the level of charges were set in each of the last five years for the use of *(a)* Eskmeals and *(b)* Shoeburyness ranges. [16483]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 18 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your questions about the levels of charges and operating costs and increases in charges of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) ranges at Eskmeals and Shoeburyness, since as Chief Executive of DERA, this is a matter for which I am responsible. I will cover both questions in this letter.

Charges for the use of the ranges are set at a level which should enable the full cost of operating the facilities to be recovered, based upon a predicted level of demand. In the event, a significant reduction in the level of customer demand for the facilities on both ranges has resulted in income falling well short of that required to cover the cost of operating them.

Information on the level of charges is only available from when DTEO began trading, as part of DERA in 1995. At Eskmeals, the average increase in rates from 1995/6 to 1996/7 was 1.5%. However the basis of charging for the use of facilities at Shoeburyness changed between 1995/6 when, for example, there were five different rates for static trials, and 1996/7 when there were 15. Direct comparisons are not therefore possible.

I hope this is helpful.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from members of the public regarding the safety of *(a)* the Eskmeals and *(b)* the Shoeburyness ranges. [16476]

Mr. Arbuthnot: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Dr. John Cunningham, dated 18 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the numbers of representations that have been received from members of the public regarding safety at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) ranges at Eskmeals and Shoeburyness, since as Chief Executive of DERA, this is a matter for which I am responsible.

I am not aware of any concerns expressed by members of the public about the safety of operations at either of the ranges since they became part of DERA in 1995.

I hope this is helpful.

Army Manning

Mr. Lamont: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further initiatives he is taking to improve manning in the Army. [16743]

Mr. Soames: I am determined to reverse the current levels of undermanning in the armed forces. We shall accelerate our recruiting efforts, which already show a marked improvement in results over previous years. The Army alone will need up to 17,000 recruits per annum over the next few years.

Numbers are not the only issue, however. Equally important is the need to attract recruits of the right quality to cope with the complexities of modern warfare, and to provide the highest standards of leadership, for which our forces are rightly renowned and which were previously provided under the junior leaders scheme.

To obtain suitable high quality recruits in sufficient numbers, we propose to supplement our current recruiting methods with a new approach designed to attract school leavers of 16 years and over interested in gaining qualifications and enhanced career opportunities as well as guaranteed employment.

I have decided, therefore, to open a new Army foundation college in September 1998. It will offer a 42-week Army foundation course for soldiers destined for front line roles, combining military and leadership

training with vocational education. It will develop key skills in numeracy, communications, information technology, personal skills and problem solving, needed for access to national vocational qualifications.

When fully established the college will accommodate up to 1,300 students. Its graduates will therefore contribute significantly to resolving the Army's manning difficulties. We are confident that many of them will rise to fill key positions, providing the Army with high quality leadership into the future.

Following the example of other successful defence projects, such as the recent competition for the new joint services command and staff college, we intend to seek private finance for the college. There is a possible site available at the former army apprentices college at Harrogate, which we shall draw to the attention of bidders, but it would not be appropriate to take a firm decision on location at this stage.

The new Army foundation college will ensure that the Army is well placed to attract the best young men and women into its ranks. It will offer ambitious young people valuable qualifications and one of the most challenging and worthwhile careers in the country today.

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7414]

Mr. Soames: In addition to service recruiting campaigns, which continue throughout the year, my Department sponsors, organises and controls centrally activities aimed at promoting understanding of Defence policy and the armed forces. These have taken the form, principally, of a touring Defence policy exhibition which for a number of years has followed a programme of displays at public events across the country; and in the work of the single service presentation teams which operate throughout the year. During the next six months, it is planned to mount the Defence policy exhibition at the Birmingham international boat and caravan show over nine days in February.

Excluding manpower, the overall cost of the Defence policy exhibition in 1996–97 is expected to be £453,000, of which the display costs at Birmingham amount to £38,000.

The costs of the single service presentation teams, primarily service manpower, in 1996–97 are expected to be £1.785 million.

The costs of service recruitment campaigns in 1996–97 are expected to amount to £33.51 million.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7532]

Mr. Soames: Expenditure on the Defence policy exhibition—excluding manpower—service presentation teams and service recruitment advertising in each of the last five years for which information is available was as follows:

	1991–92 £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £	[1]*1996–97* £
Policy	116,453	167,390	190,406	259,384	324,740	453,000
Navy	[2]—	538,639	637,249	571,312	590,974	592,000
Army	[2]—	[2]—	494,000	831,000	1,009,000	586,000
RAF	[2]—	339,000	555,000	615,000	652,000	607,000

[1] Forecast.

[2] Information not held centrally.

We do not publish detailed future plans as approval to commit expenditure is subject to formal endorsement through Ministers and the parliamentary supply system.

Recruitment

£ million

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	[1]*1996–97*
Navy[3]	[2]—	3.583	3.617	3.505	6.912	6.816
Army[4]	10.995	8.094	9.537	10.893	22.272	21.590
RAF	3.244	2.058	2.256	3.812	3.535	5.108

[1] Forecast.

[2] Information not held centrally.

[3] Includes all costs attributable to marketing the RN/RM as a career.

[4] Includes all costs attributable to marketing the Army as a career and expenditure on recruiting and publicity for the Territorial Army.

We do not publish detailed future plans as approval to commit expenditure is subject to formal endorsement through Ministers and the parliamentary supply system.

SCOTLAND

Hospital Beds

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many beds there were in each NHS trust in Scotland in each year from 1994 to 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15896]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table shows the average daily number of beds staffed and available for the reception of in-patients and day cases.

Changes in the number of available staffed beds between 1994 and 1996 reflect several developments, including shorter lengths of stay for patients receiving treatment in acute specialties, greater use of day case surgery, and the increase in the number of patients being cared for in the community rather than in hospital.

NHS hospitals—average available staffed beds by NHS Trust[1]—years ending 31 March 1994 to 1996

NHS Trust	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Scotland	44,185	42,351	40,555
Argyll and Clyde			
Argyll and Bute NHS Trust	639	652	620
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	380	368	364
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust	428	408	405
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	1,715	1,651	1,633
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	523	513	500
Ayrshire and Arran			
Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust	1,050	1,007	945
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	944	902	877
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	699	667	586
Borders			
Borders Community Health Services NHS Trust	443	436	418
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust	392	377	379
Dumfries and Galloway			
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	160	454	469
Dumfries and Galloway Community Health NHS Trust	827	772	714
Fife			
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	1,789	1,615	1,517
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	419	474	439
Queen Margaret Hospitals NHS Trust	369	365	366
Forth Valley			
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	1,751	1,653	1,525
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	405	395	394
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	442	456	429
Grampian			
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	1,420	1,418	1,425
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	2,789	2,578	2,414
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	425	418	437
Greater Glasgow			
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	1,420	1,291	1,263
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	2,775	2,650	2,364
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	1,169	1,065	1,066
Stobhill NHS Trust	943	859	784
The Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	1,035	943	918
The Yorkhill NHS Trust	414	421	397
West Glasgow Hospitals University NHS Trust	1,457	1,318	1,303
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust	—	—	—
Highland			
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	216	226	226
Highland Communities NHS Trust	886	847	788
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	619	600	600
Lanarkshire			
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	776	773	754
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	1,943	1,777	1,689
Law Hospital NHS Trust	6984	663	645
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	652	643	645
Lothian			
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	1,130	1,111	1,090
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	1,618	1,598	1,533
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	146	159	141
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	1,613	1,599	1,432
West Lothian NHS Trust	981	1,007	990
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	825	815	814
Orkney			
Orkney Health Board Unit	152	150	150
Shetland			
Shetland Hospitals and Community Services Unit	142	137	136
Tayside			
Angus NHS Trust	834	802	774
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	1,152	1,091	1,032

NHS hospitals—average available staffed beds by NHS Trust[1]—years ending 31 March 1994 to 1996

NHS Trust	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	1,068	1,061	1,023
Pert and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	950	904	891
Western Isles			
Western Isles Health Unit	266	265	250

[1] Composition of trusts is based on services provided during year ending 31 March 1996. Includes directly managed units.

Timber Products

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action has been taken to implement the recommendations of the Forest Stewardship Council in respect of standards for the sustainability of timber products. [15485]

Mr. Kynoch: The Forestry Commission is consulting widely on a draft UK forestry standard and will take account of the Forest Stewardship Council's views.

Sinclair Gardens, Bishopbriggs

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the date for the public inquiry into the pathway closure at Sinclair gardens in Bishopbriggs, Glasgow. [15698]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has not been asked to confirm an order extinguishing the right of way over a path at Sinclair gardens in Bishopbriggs, Glasgow. If such a request is made by East Dunbartonshire council consideration will be given to the need for a public inquiry.

BSE (Cattle Cull)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's search for cattle associated with BSE cases to be culled under the terms of the Florence agreement; how many cattle have been identified so far; what is his latest estimate of the likely total; how many farms are involved; and what is his estimate of the time scale for completing this search and concluding the accelerated cull. [16318]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: On-farm visits to natal herds, in which a confirmed case of BSE was born, started in the week beginning 27 January. So far, the total number of Scottish cattle that have been identified through these visits as having been exposed to the same feed as BSE cases is 286. Of this number, 49 animals have so far been confirmed as exposed by the central veterinary unit, all of which have moved out of the natal herd and need to be traced further. The latest estimate of the number of cattle affected in Great Britain is 90,000 to 100,000, of which around 4,300 may be in Scotland. However, the true number of animals affected can be determined only by on-farm visits.

Around 300 farms in Scotland have herds in which a confirmed case of BSE was born. Farms which have bought in exposed animals will also be affected. Again, the number of such farms can only be established through the visits to the natal herds, and subsequent tracing visits.

It is very difficult at this early stage to estimate the length of time it will take to conclude the cull.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kashmir

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to and what reports he has received from the authorities in *(a)* Kashmir and *(b)* India concerning the hostage Paul Wells. [16226]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Mr right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the kidnapping of Paul Wells and Keith Mangan with his Indian and Pakistani counterparts during his January visits. We remain deeply troubled that there has been no confirmed news of the two men since August 1995. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made our concern clear and obtained assurances of all possible assistance in finding out what has happened to the men. He has since written to their families. The Foreign Office consular division will keep them fully informed of any developments.

We are in touch with the Indian authorities, and with the Chief Minister of Kashmir. The diplomatic missions of the UK, USA, Germany and Norway also follow closely the investigation undertaken by the Jammu and Kashmir police.

Israel

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what mechanisms of scrutiny the Government propose to put forward to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* other EU bodies in relation to article 2 of the EU–Israel association agreement; and if he will take steps to ensure these mechanisms are sufficiently transparent to allow assessment of the operation and effect of the human rights clause in the association agreement. [16191]

Mr. Hanley: Heads of diplomatic missions of EU member states in Israel and the occupied territories, as in other countries, continually monitor the human rights situation and send regular reports to the EU Presidency, which are seen by all Member State governments. This includes reporting in connection with the association agreements. The EU–Israel association agreement will establish a political dialogue which will allow the EU to raise human rights issues more effectively with the Israeli Government. The association council set up under the agreement will examine any major issues arising under the agreement.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of Israel's compliance with articles 1 and 38 of the EU-Israel interim agreement on trade and trade-related matters. [16325]

Mr. Hanley: Article 1 of the agreement concerns respect for human rights and democratic principles. We and the EU regularly raise these important matters with the Israeli Government. Article 38 is about the territories to which the agreement applies: as it applies to the territory of the state of Israel, it would not include the

occupied territories. The question of whether Israel would be in breach of the agreement by certifying goods produced in the occupied territories as produced in Israel is a matter for the Commission.

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has received from Israel in respect of its compliance with articles 1 and 38 of the EU-Israel association agreement once Parliament has ratified that agreement. [16326]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to my previous answer. Articles 1 and 38 in the interim agreement are equivalent to articles 2 and 83 in the association agreement. We have received no assurances bilaterally from Israel on this agreement, which is between Israel and the EU.

South Africa

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what travel advice his Department provides for travellers visiting South Africa. [15898]

Dr Liam Fox: The current travel advice for South Africa, issued on 7 February 1997, states:

> Incidents of armed attack, mugging and car hijacking are common, both during daylight hours and at night. The level of violent crime is high, particularly in the Johannesburg area. The murder rate is high and victims in recent months have included a number of foreigners. Care is required in all major cities. Isolated areas should be avoided. Drivers should park in well-lit areas and never pick up strangers. It is inadvisable to wear expensive jewellery or carry cameras when walking in urban areas. The minimum of cash should be carried. Townships and surrounding areas should be avoided.
>
> If staying in an hotel, seek the advice of the management about which areas should be avoided. Visitors should contact the British High Commission/Consulate for further guidance. British High Commission Pretoria; (012) 342 2200; British Consulate General Johannesburg; (011) 327 0015; British Consulate Cape Town; (021) 253 670; British Consulate Durban; (031) 305 2929; British Consulate East London; (0431) 54 430; British Consulate Port Elizabeth; (041) 55 2423.

China

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Chinese Government concerning the treatment of political prisoners. [16327]

Mr. Hanley: We regularly raise our concerns on human rights, including the treatment of political prisoners, with the Chinese authorities, both bilaterally and through the European Union. My right hon. and learned Friend and Foreign Secretary did so most recently during his talks with Qian Qichen in Singapore on 14 February.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Chinese Government concerning Ngawang Choephel's imprisonment in Sangyip. [16328]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 3 February 1997, *Official Report*, column 504.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Chinese Government concerning conditions at Sangyip. [16329]

Mr. Hanley: We have not made any specific representations to the Chinese Government concerning conditions at Sangyip prison. However, my right hon. and learned Friend and the Foreign Secretary raised our concerns about Tibet with the Chinese Foreign Minister when they met in Singapore on 14 February.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February. [15113]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 February. [15114]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Residential Properties

Mr. Meale: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the residential properties which are within his gift. [15709]

The Prime Minister: Chevening, Dorneywood and the three flats in Admiralty house.

Manpower Information Service

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment he had made of the national on-line manpower information service report from the university of Durham; and if he will make a statement. [16307]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I have been asked to reply.

NOMIS—national on-line manpower information system—is the Office for National Statistics on-line labour market statistics database run under contract by the university of Durham. It enables users to access electronically via a modem link, a wide range of official labour market statistics.

NOMIS does not produce reports, but the information that it makes available is widely used for research purposes and under crown copyright is quoted as the source of information.

There are currently 800 subscribers to NOMIS, including local authorities, academics, research bodies, central Government and the commercial sector.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Belize

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a final decision will be taken by the Overseas Development Administration over

Britain's contribution to the building of the Belize southern highway project; and what criteria will govern the appraisal of this project. [16194]

Dr. Liam Fox: We expect to take a decision by June 1997. Project appraisal will be undertaken in accordance with established procedures, which require rigorous examination of economic, environmental, social and technical aspects.

Regional Political Conference (Great Lakes Region)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the British Government have recently held with *(a)* the Secretary-General of the United Nations, *(b)* the United States Government, *(c)* the Canadian Government and *(d)* regional Governments regarding the holding of a regional political conference in the great lakes region. [16324]

Dr. Liam Fox: The UK is in close contact with EU partners, the UN, and with regional states, regarding a regional political conference on the Great Lakes. We fully supported recent statements by the European Union and UN Security Council endorsing such a conference. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development raised the issue during bilateral meetings this year with the Presidents of Uganda and Kenya.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to facilitate the holding of a regional political conference in the great lakes region. [16323]

Dr. Fox: We believe that regional states must take a leading role in efforts to hold an international conference on the great lakes, and have regularly encouraged them to do so. We fully support the appointment of the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General and the Organisation for African Unity, Mohamed Sahnoun, who will co-ordinate international and regional efforts towards such a conference, which should be held under UN and OAU auspices. He is planning to visit London soon. The UK will continue to play an active role in the preparations for the conference.

Rwanda

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the United Nations inspector-general contained in his report on the international genocide trials in Rwanda. [16322]

Dr. Liam Fox: I welcome the recent report by the UN office of internal oversight services into the international tribunal, which has identified areas of serious concern in the management of the tribunal. I commend Secretary-General Annan's announcement that he intends to reform the management of the tribunal.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* representations he has received and *(b)* discussions he has participated in regarding the management of the international genocide trials in Rwanda. [16321]

Dr. Fox: We have received no representations regarding the international criminal tribunal. We fully support UN Secretary-General Annan's intention to address vigorously the reported problems in the management of the tribunal.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

The Buying Agency

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what targets he has set for The Buying Agency. [16683]

Mr. Freeman: I have set the agency the following targets for 1997:

Financial

to generate a return on capital employed of 8 per cent.

to increase sales of the core business by 20 per cent.

to increase customers of the fuel and energy business by 5 per cent.

Productivity

to reduce the cost per £ of savings from the core business to 4.4p.

to reduce the cost per £ of core business sales to 2.6p.

Customer satisfaction

to resolve 95 per cent. of customer complaints in one month.

to deliver 94 per cent. of direct orders by the due date.

Internal quality

to improve the quality of the agency's workplace by achieving the health at work award.

Environmental

to set up an environmental management system as described in ISO 14001 standard.

Ministerial Travel Costs

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what were the *(a)* total costs and *(b)* costs to each Department of (i) ministerial travel expenses (ii) foreign visits and (iii) accommodation costs in respect of (1) foreign visits and (2) other travel associated with ministerial duties in each year since 1992. [16256]

Mr. Freeman: The information required is not held centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Privatised Utilities (Information)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guidance he has issued to the privatised utility regulators concerning the disclosure of information by the companies which they regulate. [15345]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The right of domestic and smaller commercial consumers of electricity and gas to change supplier can be exercised with a minimum of bureaucracy only if certain specified information about customers can be passed between licensed suppliers. In October, at the request of The Office of Electricity

Regulation, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Energy made the Electricity Act 1989 (Disclosure of Information) (Licence Holders) Order 1996 to facilitate this. The Office of Gas Supply has had access to technical advice given by my Department to British Gas about the requirements of section 42 of the Gas Act 1986, as amended. The provisions in the new order and the Gas Act are subject to the normal requirements of the Data Protection Act 1984, which is administered by the Data Protection Registrar.

Brent Spar

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date his Department was first notified of Shell UK's proposals to dispose of the Brent Spar at sea. [15648]

Mr. Page: Consideration of Shell UK's proposals to dispose of the Brent Spar was spread over a period running form August 1991 to December 1994.

Trade Fair Support Scheme

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations the Government have received from trade associations about the proposed changes to the trade fair support scheme. [15719]

Mr. Nelson: As at 14 February 1997 officials and Ministers in my Department had received letters from 40 trade associations on this topic.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons the Government are withdrawing financial support for the trade fair support scheme. [15718]

Mr. Nelson: The Government will continue to support a substantial number of trade fairs.

The Government will be supporting core events under trade fair support scheme rules until March 1999. Support will be increasingly available for other fairs through the sector challenge. This will allow industry to propose more flexible and longer-term projects for exploiting the export opportunities that overseas trade fairs offer.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the level of financial support by the Government to the trade fair support scheme in the last three financial years. [15717]

Mr. Nelson: The amounts are:

Year	*£ million*
1994–95	17.1
1995–96	19.9
1996–97	[1]18.9

[1] Estimate.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the board of Trade if he will meet the British Ceramic Plant and Machinery Manufacturers Association to discuss the changes to the trade fair support scheme. [15720]

Mr. Nelson: My Department has met a number of trade associations to discuss the changes and is willing to meet the British Ceramic Plant and Machinery Manufacturers Association.

Coal

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what have been the prices per tonne in sterling of coal *(a)* imports and *(b)* exports for each month from October 1996 to date. [15879]

Mr. Page: Import and export data are available to November 1996.

	Average monthly price £ per tonne	
	Import	*Export*
October 1996	36.48	48.92
November 1996	34.13	51.54

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the tonnage of coal *(a)* imports and *(b)* exports for each month from October 1996 to date. [15878]

Mr. Page: Import and export data are available to November 1996.

Thousand tonnes

	Imports	*Exports*
October 1996	1,206	100
November 1996	1,941	115

Domestic Utility Prices

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in which of the past 25 years the domestic prices of *(a)* electricity, *(b)* gas and *(c)* telephone calls fell in (i) real and (ii) nominal prices. [15835]

Mr. Page: The years when a fall in prices have occurred relative to the preceding year are shown in the table. All prices include VAT where appropriate.

	Electricity	*Gas*	*Telecoms*[1]
Real terms	1972, 1973, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1993, 1995, 1996	1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1996	1977, 1978, 1979, 1983, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996
Nominal terms	1987, 1993, 1996	1987, 1992, 1993	1977, 1983, 1994, 1995, 1996

Note:
[1] Telecoms data are for 1994 onwards only.
Source:
Retail Prices Index, Office for National Statistics.

Energy Research Budget

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the research budget for *(a)* coal, *(b)* nuclear, *(c)* gas and oil and *(d)* renewable energy sources in 1996; and in each case what was the figure as a percentage of his Department's total budget. [15881]

Mr. Page: The Department's expenditure plans for these programmes for 1996–97 may be found on page 34 of "Trade and Industry: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1996–97 to 1998–99", Cm 3205, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The Department's overall expenditure plans are summarised on page 8 of the same publication.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the number of persons employed through private employment agencies for the last five years for which figures are available. [16240]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The labour force survey historical supplement published last year gives the following figures for those working through agencies on a temporary basis.

Spring 1992: 81,000
Spring 1993: 91,000
Spring 1994: 114,000
Spring 1995: 161,000
Spring 1996: 201,000

In addition, employment agencies find permanent fixed period contract, seasonal and other forms of employment for workers which are not included in the above figures.

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of employment agencies that were officially registered for each year that it was a statutory requirement to register. [16239]

Mr. Taylor: The licensing of employment agencies under the Employment Agencies Act 1973 commenced in June 1976. The number licensed at the end of each year ending 31 March until licensing ceased on 3 January 1995 is as follows:

1976–77: 3,991
1977–78: 5,336
1978–79: 6,000
1979–80: 6,760
1980–81: 6,787
1981–82: 6,579
1982–83: 6,618
1983–84: 7,019
1984–85: 7,830
1985–86: 9,000
1986–87: 10,352
1987–88: 11,769
1988–89: 14,137
1989–90: 16,537
1990–91: 17,193
1991–92: 15,644
1992–93: 14,422
1993–94: 14,808
1994–95: 15,202

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will estimate the number of employment agencies operating in the United Kingdom for each year since deregulation. [16241]

Mr. Taylor: Agencies in Great Britain continue to be regulated under the provisions of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 and associated regulations. Similar arrangements apply in Northern Ireland. The licensing requirements were replaced by a power of prohibition on 3 January 1995. Since then there has been no requirement for employment agencies to notify either this Department, or the Department of Economic Development in Northern Ireland, of their existence or closure.

Electricity Cables

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many miles of the National Grid's overhead electricity distribution cables have been relaid underground in each of the past 10 years. [15790]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the company.

Mink Pelts

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many mink pelts were imported into the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available. [16413]

Mr. Nelson: In 1995 the UK imported 753,000 mink fur skins.

Employment Protection

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the employment protection legislation which does not apply to people employed by an employment agency rather than the company for which they work. [16472]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Employment protection legislation applies in the same way to all employees, whether they are employed by an employment business or by a company.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16276]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department is committed to complying with the requirements of all health and safety legislation relating to the identification and control of hazardous materials in the workplace, and replacing ozone depleting substances with environmentally friendly alternatives. My Department occupies some 220 sites: assessments of the amount of hazardous materials and ozone-depleting substances are held locally. These assessments have not been collated centrally.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16420]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My departmental policy has been to concentrate on larger sites in implementing environmental audits. My Department uses the Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method—BREEAM—when undertaking large building refurbishments. Following refurbishment of the No.1 Victoria street headquarters building a BREEAM assessment rating of "very good" was achieved.

Wherever possible, my Department uses the DIY environmental performance checklist, produced for premises managers by the Environment Agency and within the DTI headquarters estate. My Department has implemented an environmental management audit system, which is aimed at assessing and recording the estates impact on the environment. By 1998, my Department will have reduced its impact on the external environment by moving from 25 per cent. to 75 per cent. waste recycling.

Airbus

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total expenditure to date on launch aid for the Airbus A330/340 aircraft; and when he expects repayments to begin. [15855]

Mr. Greg Knight: Total launch aid of £447.1 million has been granted for the Airbus A330/340 aircraft. Based on current estimates of aircraft sales, I expect repayments to begin in early 1998.

Nuclear Contamination

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the claims against (i) his Department and (ii) the nuclear generating companies for nuclear contamination for each year since 1980; what is the value of each *(a)* claim and *(b)* settlement; and how many are currently outstanding. [15951]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Claims for compensation against alleged nuclear contamination have to be lodged in accordance with the terms of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965. Three claims have been made against the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under section 16(3), all in 1991–92. None was successful and no cases are currently outstanding.

The nuclear industry operate a voluntary compensation scheme for radiation linked diseases, an industry/trade union "no fault" voluntary scheme, which covers the entire industry—both civilian and, more recently, military—rather than just the power generators themselves. Between its inception in 1982 and the end of 1996, this scheme paid out £3.25 million in compensation in a total of 73 cases out of around 650 claims.

To protect the identity of individual claimants, more detailed data on these claims and settlements cannot be made available.

Nuclear Waste Transport

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the costs of security for, and escorting of, the transport of nuclear waste by *(a)* rail and *(b)* road for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [15950]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Ensuring the safety and security of nuclear materials, including nuclear waste, during transportation whether by rail or road is the top priority for the owners of this material and the carriers. It is not possible to separate out the security costs from the overall costs of transportation, which are a matter for the owners.

There are no costs specifically incurred in the escorting of nuclear waste.

Digital Broadcasting

Dr. Howells: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what extra resources will be made available to the Office of Telecommunications as a direct result of its responsibility for regulating access to digital broadcasting networks; what plans he has to meet the additional costs involved by a levy on broadcasters; and if he will make a statement. [16028]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The level of resources available to Office of Telecommunications is a matter for the Treasury. However, Oftel's cash limit increased to £10.4 million for 1997–98, compared to £9.1 million for 1996–97. This increase was partly in recognition of increasing enforcement responsibilities, including in relation to digital broadcasting. The allocation of resources within this total is a matter for the director general and I have asked him to write to the hon. Member. Oftel is funded by licence fees paid to the Government. The supply of conditional access to digital televisions is regulated by Oftel through a class licence granted by the Secretary of State under section 7 of the Telecommunications Act 1994. The licence contains provisions to allow the Director General of Telecommunications to set licence fees payable by operators of conditional access systems authorised by the licence. The director general will set fees for any licensee to reflect the level of enforcement activity required by the general nature of the activity involved and by any particular licensee. Accordingly, the costs of enforcement will be borne by the conditional access operators and there are no plans for a general levy on broadcasters for this purpose.

Engineering Policy Unit

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the aims and objectives of his Department's engineering policy unit; and if he will make a statement. [16114]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The mission of my Department's engineering policy unit is to promote the better development and use of engineering skills to improve the competitiveness of UK industry. It has strategic responsibility for stimulating innovation and encouraging best management practice in the selection, education, training, recruitment, employment and development of engineers and technicians. It is the single point of contact for matters pertaining to all the engineering institutions and is responsible for transdepartmental engineering human resource policy matters.

The engineering policy unit has developed, enabled and supported the hugely successful "action for engineering" initiative, which has brought together some 125 representatives from industry, business, the professional institutions, academia, Government and charities in a steering group and six task forces to take co-ordinated action to increase substantially the influence, involvement and achievement of professional engineers and technicians for the benefit of British industry. With my Department's support, action for engineering has implemented or developed 32 projects for members of the engineering community to take forward.

The engineering policy unit has also supported the strategic development of the Year of Engineering Success.

The unit has been instrumental in fostering a new spirit of collaboration and cooperation within the engineering community and seeks to maintain a dynamic dialogue between the educators and trainers of engineers on the one hand and employers of engineers on the other. It ensures that the needs of industry are reflected in Government policy and supply side initiatives on engineering education and training.

Chemical Weapons Advisory Committee

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will make an announcement on the composition of the Chemical Weapons Advisory Committee. [16111]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* We expect soon to be in a position to make an announcement about the appointment of the chairman of the Chemical Weapons Advisory Committee. A subsequent announcement will be made about the other members of the committee, who will be selected following consultations with the newly appointed chairman. The committee will be in place before the chemical weapons convention comes into effect on 29 April 1997.

TRANSPORT

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special references to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14948]

Mr. Watts: Since 1994–95, my Department has provided more than £2 million of funding for the Bournemouth and Poole transport packages, which consist of junction improvements, park and ride, road safety schemes, and improved cycling and walking facilities. In 1997–98, Bournemouth will receive £200,000 for its share of the package funding. As from 1 April when Bournemouth becomes a unitary authority, total Department of Transport funding for 1997–98 will be £564,000.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) of 27 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *273–76*, what is his current estimate of the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net proceeds of sale of companies previously owned by British Rail. [15402]

Mr. Watts: Total gross proceeds of those companies, which were previously owned by British Rail and which have been sold pursuant to the Railways Act 1993, are £5.35 billion. This includes dividends of some £800 million and £50 million paid before the sales of rolling stock leasing companies and BR infrastructure companies; proceeds still to be realised from the sale of Railtrack plc; and gross proceeds of sales completed after 27 November 1996. Vendors' costs of sales up to 31 March 1996 are estimated to be £51.66 million. As completion accounts and costs of sales for a number of sales in the current year have yet to be finalised, an estimate of net proceeds is not available.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his current estimate of the cost of departmental staff working on rail privatisation; and what sums his Department has spent on bought in services in this connection. [15401]

Mr. Watts: My current estimate of the cost of departmental staff working on rail privatisation in 1996–97 is £2.1 million; the cost of services bought in in connection with rail privatisation in 1996–97 is £5.8 million, exclusive of VAT.

Rail Services (Punctuality and Reliability)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of trains, which arrived more than five minutes later during peak hours on each of the former Network SouthEast lines in each four week period since December 1995. [15962]

Mr. Watts: Information for the number of franchised services which arrived more than five minutes late during the peaks is not currently available. Available information for British Rail services and for the percentage of franchised services which arrived more than five minutes late during the peaks is in the tables.

Number over five minutes late (BR)	*p10 1995–96*	*p11 1995–96*	*p12 1995–96*	*p13 1995–96*	*p1 1996–97*	*p2 1996–97*	*p3 1996–97*	*p4 1996–97*	*p5 1996–97*	*p6 1996–97*	*p7 1996–97*	*p8 1996–97*	*p9 1996–97*
Chiltern	40	62	79	41	35	38	102	45	franchised				
Great Eastern	544	441	399	137	113	129	256	153	127	138	156	276	453
Isle of Wight	data not available												
London Tilbury and Southend	160	160	157	133	74	107	franchised						
Northampton Lines	143	155	250	176	211	84	162	104	86	118	103	193	181
North London Lines	data not available												
Kent Coast	490	410	464	328	134	102	237	175	200	169	225	franchised	
Kentlink	838	762	903	597	314	263	559	381	302	361	506	franchised	
South London Lines	404	333	324	266	193	206	franchised						
Sussex Coast	186	180	220	145	101	82	franchised						
Solent and Wessex (main line)	141	140	franchised										
South Western Lines (suburban)	301	216	franchised										
Thames	94	99	109	83	47	61	114	69	114	55	109	franchised	
Thameslink	171	203	160	200	72	75	146	181	107	88	164	183	219
Great Northern	334	286	417	227	138	172	170	123	121	246	227	396	328
West Anglia	177	128	181	73	52	41	101	114	68	50	43	331	151
North London Orbital	data not available												
Watford Locals	73	73	110	87	86	54	45	45	48	25	33	87	87

Percentage over 5 minutes late (BR)	*p10 1995–96*	*p11 1995–96*	*p12 1995–96*	*p13 1995–96*	*p1 1996–97*	*p2 1996–97*	*p3 1996–97*	*p4 1996–97*	*p5 1996–97*	*p6 1996–97*	*p7 1996–97*	*p8 1996–97*	*p9 1996–97*
Chiltern	4.8	5.8	7.8	3.8	3.6	3.7	10.0	4.2	franchised				
Great Eastern	24.4	15.9	14.8	4.9	4.5	4.9	9.8	5.6	4.7	5.3	5.7	10.0	16.5
Isle of Wight	data not available												
London Tilbury and Southend	13.8	9.4	9.8	7.8	4.8	6.6	franchised						

Percentage over 5 minutes late (BR)	p10 1995–96	p11 1995–96	p12 1995–96	p13 1995–96	p1 1996–97	p2 1996–97	p3 1996–97	p4 1996–97	p5 1996–97	p6 1996–97	p7 1996–97	p8 1996–97	p9 1996–97
Northampton Lines	18.3	13.5	27.7	20.9	24.6	7.7	14.6	8.9	8.2	11.4	8.7	16.9	16.4
North London Lines	data not available												
Kent Coast	24.4	20.7	19.7	13.1	6.0	4.3	10.3	7.3	8.4	7.3	9.4	franchised	
Kentlink	22.4	21.0	19.9	12.9	7.7	6.0	12.7	8.2	6.5	8.2	10.9	franchised	
South London Lines	15.1	8.7	8.5	6.9	5.6	5.6	franchised						
Sussex Coast	18.9	12.8	15.5	10.2	7.9	6.1	franchised						
Solent and Wessex (train line)	14.6	10.3	franchised										
South Western Lines (Suburban)	11.9	5.9	franchised										
Thames	8.0	6.7	7.6	5.5	3.5	4.3	8.1	4.8	7.7	3.9	7.4	franchised	
Thameslink	18.1	16.7	13.9	18.1	6.8	6.4	12.6	15.9	9.3	7.6	13.3	17.8	17.9
Great Northern	18.9	13.3	20.7	10.9	7.1	8.3	8.3	5.6	5.5	11.9	10.7	18.9	15.2
West Anglia	10.0	6.1	9.1	3.5	2.7	2.0	5.1	5.4	3.2	2.5	2.0	15.6	7.1
North London Orbital	Data not available												
Watford Locals	14.7	10.9	16.7	16.2	10.8	8.9	7.1	6.7	7.4	4.2	4.9	12.9	13.1

Percentage of franchised peak services arriving more than five minutes late

Train operator	Route group	1995–96 percentage P12	P13	1996–97 percentage P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
South West Trains	Main Line	17	6.3	6.1	5	8	6.2	8.5	8.7	6.9	20.6	19.4	10.6
	Suburban	11.8	4.4	4.1	4.2	8.1	5.6	8.1	5.4	4.3	13.3	15.2	8.8
Connex South Central	South London Lines	—	—	—	—	5.9	5.3	4.3	4.2	6.8	16	22.4	10.5
	Sussex Coast	—	—	—	—	10.2	7.2	9	9	8.1	11.7	12.5	14.3
LTS Rail		—	—	—	—	6.3	6	4.2	5.2	5.5	6.1	6.6	5.4
Chiltern		—	—	—	—	—	—	5.4	3.8	7.7	11	6.9	3.5
South Eastern	Kent Link	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20.2	21.4	18.8
	Kent Coast	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	23.7	24.1	19.7
Thames		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8.7	8.7	9.3

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of trains cancelled on each of the former Network SouthEast lines in each four week period since December 1995. [15963]

Mr. Watts: Information for the number of franchised services cancelled is not currently available. Available information for British Rail services and for the percentage of franchised services cancelled is in the tables.

Trains cancelled (BR)	p10 1995–96	p11 1995–96	p12 1995–96	p13 1995–96	p1 1996–97	p2 1996–97	p3 1996–97	p4 1996–97	p5 1996–97	p6 1996–97	p7 1996–97	p8 1996–97	p9 1996–97
Chiltern	17	17	35	5	12	15	33	15	franchised				
Great Eastern	64	121	150	44	43	25	131	29	32	23	54	33	93
Isle of Wight	8	5	23	8	2	20	19	10	2	13	3	franchised	
London Tilbury and Southend	201	68	95	83	57	47	franchised						
Northampton Lines	38	20	36	32	20	11	43	21	52	20	23	124	21
North London Lines	data not available												
Kent Coast	103	83	131	96	71	47	89	45	51	51	118	franchised	
Kentlink	174	178	267	259	163	128	245	134	115	175	202	—	—
South London Lines	63	80	107	67	38	49	franchised						
Sussex Coast	44	55	105	33	24	54	franchised						
Solent and Wessex (main line)	52	46	franchised										
South Western Lines (suburban)	157	66	franchised										
Thames	221	352	321	159	132	37	133	91	106	97	108	franchised	
Thameslink	116	90	84	45	28	28	70	175	79	47	66	64	79
Great Northern	174	80	138	62	144	42	54	48	51	159	221	222	50
West Anglia	203	104	114	52	33	33	251	81	26	48	38	82	63
North London Orbital	528	290	708	393	230	170	192	211	237	86	193	95	138
Watford Locals	65	41	76	37	17	13	59	67	81	90	20	56	55

Percentage cancelled (BR)	p10 1995–96	p11 1995–96	p12 1995–96	p13 1995–96	p1 1996–97	p2 1996–97	p3 1996–97	p4 1996–97	p5 1996–97	p6 1996–97	p7 1996–97	p8 1996–97	p9 1996–97
Chiltern	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.8	0.3	franchised				
Great Eastern	0.6	0.9	1.1	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.7
Isle of Wight	0.5	0.3	1.4	0.5	0.1	1.1	1.1	0.6	0.1	0.7	0.2	franchised	
London Tilbury and Southend	3.6	1.0	1.4	1.2	1.0	0.7	franchised						
Northampton Lines	1.3	0.5	1.1	1.1	0.7	0.3	1.0	0.5	1.3	0.5	0.5	2.8	0.5
North London Lines	data not available												
Kent Coast	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.9	franchised	
Kentlink	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.2	0.9	0.6	1.1	0.6	0.5	0.8	0.9	franchised	
South London Lines	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.2	0.3	franchised						
Sussex Coast	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.3	0.2	0.4	franchised						
Solent and Wessex (main line)	0.6	0.4	franchised										
South Western Lines (suburban)	1.2	0.4	franchised										
Thames	1.8	2.3	2.1	1.0	0.9	0.3	0.9	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	franchised	
Thameslink	2.5	1.6	1.6	0.8	0.6	0.5	1.3	3.1	1.4	0.9	1.2	1.3	1.4
Great Northern	2.3	0.9	1.6	0.7	1.8	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.6	1.9	2.4	2.4	0.5
West Anglia	2.4	1.0	1.2	0.5	0.4	0.3	2.6	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.8	0.6
North London Orbital	10.3	4.5	14.8	6.1	4.0	2.8	3.2	3.3	3.7	1.7	3.5	2.0	3.2
Watford Locals	2.8	1.3	2.5	1.5	0.6	0.5	2.2	2.4	2.9	3.5	0.7	2.0	2.0

Percentage of franchised services cancelled

Train operator	Route Group	1995–96 percentage P12	P13	1996–97 percentage P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
South West Trains	Main Line	0.9	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.4	1	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.5	1
	Suburban	1.3	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.4	0.7	0.4	0.2	1.4	0.4	1.4
Connex South Central	South London Lines	—	—	—	—	5	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.9
	Sussex Coast	—	—	—	—	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.9	0.8	3
LTS Rail		—	—	—	—	1.5	1.3	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.6	2.6
Chiltern		—	—	—	—	—	—	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.2
South Eastern	Kent Link	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.5	0.8	0.9
	Kent Coast	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1.3	1.4
Thames		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.7	0.7	1.3

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the terms of the passengers charter which apply to all train operating companies. [15966]

Mr. Watts: The British Rail passengers charter applies to train operating companies while they remain under the control of the British Railways Board. All franchise operators must publish their own passengers charters which must include provisions at least as favourable to passengers as those provided under British Rail's charter.

Franchise operators' passengers charters are annexed to the franchise agreement, and copies are in the Library of the House.

Freight Facilities Grants

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the total budget for the current year allocated to freight facilities grants, *(b)* the amount spent so far and *(c)* the estimated year-end spending. [16231]

Mr. Watts: The information is as follows:

(a) £5,423,000

(b) £923,528

(c) £3,604,700.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what virement there was of the unspent budgets for freight facilities grants for the years 1994–95 and 1995–96; and what this surplus was spent on. [16457]

Mr. Watts: Unspent freight facilities grant provision in 1994–95 and 1995–96 served to offset spending pressures generally elsewhere on the administration and transport services vote. An overall surplus arising on the vote in each year was surrendered to the Consolidated Fund.

Trans-Pennine Road

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from business and commercial organisations concerning the possibility of a second major trans-Pennine road supplementing the M62. [16224]

Mr. Watts: I am not aware of any recent business or commercial representations concerning the possibility of a second major trans-Pennine road supplementing the M62.

Road Lighting

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what advice and guidance he has issued to local authorities concerning their road lighting policies, with particular reference to the effect of those policies on the countryside and tranquil areas. [16229]

Mr. Watts: The Highways Agency publishes road lighting standards and advice, including measures for the limitation of environmental intrusion, for use on motorway and all-purpose trunk roads. In particular the booklet "Road Lighting and the Environment", held in the House of Commons Library, describes how the environmental impacts of road lighting can be reduced and problems resolved. It is for local highway authorities to decide the extent to which they use this advice.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of *(a)* energy use and *(b)* waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16425]

Mr. Bowis: My Department sets targets to improve energy and waste management efficiency and cost effectiveness by environmental audit and other means. Progress is reported in the annual working environment report.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16282]

Mr. Bowis: My Department publishes an assessment in its annual working environment report. A copy is in the House of Commons Library and on the Department's Internet site—http://www.open.gov.uk/dot/dothome.htm.

Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to consult *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* industry bodies and *(c)* representatives of the unemployed about the impact upon regeneration

projects of those aspects of the Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill which are supported by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [16013]

Mr. Watts: We have made it clear that, in deciding whether to set traffic reduction targets, local authorities would need the flexibility to take into account traffic growth consequent on regeneration projects, so that these objectives do not conflict, and that the Bill would need to be amended to this effect in order to secure our support. We would want to consult a wide range of bodies in drawing up guidance to local authorities on this point.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the administrative and operational impact upon local authorities of the responsibility for implementing those provisions of the Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill which are supported by his Department. [16011]

Mr. Watts: We shall be discussing detailed implementation of the Bill's requirements with local authorities. The approach we support would result in little if any additional administrative or operational impact above the activities local authorities should already undertake in compiling their transport capital investment strategies.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the implications for planning policy and procedure of the implementation of those provisions of the Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill which are supported by his Department. [16012]

Mr. Watts: The process of setting traffic targets would need to dovetail with local land use plans, which in turn would need to reflect local authorities' traffic forecasts. We would intend to issue guidance on this area.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to undertake a compliance cost assessment of the Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill; and if he will make a statement. [16009]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill will not impose a cost on business; there is no need, therefore, for a compliance cost assessment.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry, *(b)* the British Roads Federation and *(c)* other industry bodies, in connection with the impact on the economy of acceptance of the principles of the Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill; what was the thrust of those representations; what response he intends to make to them; and what plans he has to consult with industry bodies prior to proceeding with, or facilitating the progress of, any legislation to impose restrictions on road traffic. [16010]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* We have received representations from the CBI, BRF, other bodies and a large number of individuals. The vast majority of these representations have been in support of the principle underlying the Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill: that local authorities should have a clear vision of the pattern of road traffic growth in their areas, and establish targets as part of their strategy for addressing that growth. Our response to these representations is to indicate the Government's position, which I explained in my speech on the Bill's Second Reading. Subject to the Bill completing its remaining stages we plan to consult a wide range of bodies on the mechanics and process of its implementation.

Marine Pollution (Sea Empress Incident)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will place in the Library *(a)* a copy of the plans and inventories of equipment and *(b)* a list of the expertise which is currently available to the marine pollution control unit and the Coastguard Agency; and if he will indicate how the availability of equipment and expertise to those bodies has changed in the past five years; [16258]

(2) what advice or guidance was given by the marine pollution control unit to Milford Haven Port Authority on its contingency plans for dealing with oil tanker casualties and major oil spillages prior to the Sea Empress disaster on 15 February 1996; [16257]

(3) what *(a)* arrangements and *(b)* memoranda of understanding exist between the marine pollution control unit and other departments or public bodies in Wales; and if he will place copies in the Library; [16259]

(4) how many staff were employed by the marine pollution control unit in each year from 1986 to 1996. [16261]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 18 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the Marine Pollution Control Unit.

(16258)

A broad outline of the expertise that can be called upon is contained in the National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping (NCP), a copy of which is in the House of Commons library. The NCP also contains summaries of the counter pollution equipment owned by the Marine Pollution Control Unit (MPCU), listed in an appendix. The equipment and expertise available to the MPCU is under continuous review and is frequently augmented. For example, in the last five years the Chemical Strike Team has been strengthened, new equipment has been purchased for at-sea and shoreline clean-up operations, a new aerial contract has come into operation, a new operations room in the Agency's headquarters in Southampton has been commissioned and call off contracts and framework agreements have been set up to facilitate speedy access to supplementary expertise and equipment during a major incident. A database of available equipment has also been set up and is regularly updated.

(16257)

Under the current voluntary arrangements, Milford Haven Port Authority sent the MPCU a copy of their 'Anti-oil Pollution Plan' revised in June 1992. The MPCU suggested a number of changes to the document. Following the grounding of the oil tanker BORGA at the entrance to Milford Haven in October 1995, the MPCU held a meeting with the Port Authority and suggested further amendments to the contingency plans.

(16259)

The current arrangements with public bodies in Wales are fully covered in the National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping. The MPCU and Environment Agency are currently discussing a Memorandum of Understanding to replace the present one which was agreed between the MPCU and the National Rivers Authority. The environmental agencies, including the Countryside Council for Wales, are involved in these discussions.

(16261)

Staff in Post figures for MPCU from 1986 to 1996 are as follows:

1986 to 1994: 13

1994: 9.5

1994: 10.5

1996: 12.5.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if inspectors of the marine accident investigation branch have interviewed the staff of Smit Tak who were involved in or associated with the Sea Empress salvage operation. [16262]

Mr. Bowis: Yes.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the marine accidents investigation branch inquiry report into the Sea Empress. [16260]

Mr. Bowis: Subject to the completion of the consultation process required by the accident investigation regulations, the chief inspector expects to submit his final report to the Secretary of State next month. The report will then be published as soon as possible.

Trunk Roads (Land Use Planning)

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made on the proposal in the Transport Green Paper "Transport: The Way Forward," to integrate trunk road and land use planning. [16783]

Sir George Young: Following consultation with local authorities, business groups and environmental groups, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I have decided together that trunk road planning in England will now be subject to review under the regional planning guidance—RPG—system, which sets out strategic policies for land use and development and gives guidance on the transport strategy and priorities for each region. Our Departments are publishing today a consultation draft of the planning policy guidance which will bring the new system into effect. Copies have been placed in the Library.

There was strong support for our proposal. It is clear that increased regional input and local consultation at the outset of planning trunk roads will encourage a more focused approach and help to promote an agreed way forward. The proposed new guidance will allow local authorities, for the first time, to include trunk roads in their review of the transport strategy and priorities for their region when advising on RPG.

My right hon. Friend and I shall expect the local authorities to consult widely in preparing their advice to us on RPG. This will give an opportunity for local authorities, business, transport industries, environmental groups and the general public to make fuller contributions to the development of the regional transport strategy, in keeping with our policy on sustainable development. The aim is to obtain as much consensus as possible.

Through this process, the local authorities will be able to propose changes to the broad priorities for trunk road schemes, comment on the need for individual schemes and propose that alternatives be considered, for example traffic management measures or public transport improvements.

Trunk roads are an essential part of the country's infrastructure and final decisions on the DOT road programme will remain my responsibility. I shall continue to take account of vital national, commercial and economic interests alongside the regional advice.

Buses (Wheelchair Access)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new buses have been licensed in each of the last five years; and how many of these were imported. [16487]

Mr. Bowis: Investment by the bus industry in new vehicles has increased substantially in each of the last five years. The figures for newly registered buses and coaches[1] taxed for use as public service vehicles for the years in question are as follows:

1992: 3,051

1993: 3,643

1994: 4,202

1995: 5,214

1996: 6,477.

[1]Figures up to June 1995 are for all class 35—Hackney—vehicles with more than eight seats. Since June 1995 they are for all vehicles in class 34—buses.

The figure for 1996 includes 3,411 imported vehicles. Information cannot be supplied on the number of imported vehicles in the figures for 1992–95 as the statistics available on registration of imported vehicles in those years do not distinguish between buses and taxis and hire cars for public use, which were also included in class 35—Hackney vehicles.

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many new buses, licensed in each of the last five years, have allowed wheelchair users access in safety and without too much difficulty; [16485]

(2) what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of buses currently being used by bus operators meet the criteria set out in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to ensure that public buses enable a wheelchair user to alight in safety and without too much difficulty; [16484]

(3) which designs of buses currently under construction he has approved as providing access for disabled people such that a wheelchair user can get on a bus in safety and without too much difficulty. [16486]

Mr. Bowis: Information about the accessibility of vehicles is not currently recorded.

The detailed specification for the bus accessibility regulations that we are bringing forward under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is under discussion with the bus industry and our statutory advisers the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee. We intend to consult on our proposals shortly.

A growing number of operators are already investing in low floor buses which provide much easier access to all passengers, including those with disabilities. Some are also fitting the buses with ramps to enable wheelchair users to gain easy access.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended, indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16568]

Sir George Young: No Ministers or officials from my Department have attended meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994.

Bedford–Bletchley–Bicester Railway Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions have been held with Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire city councils on the upgrading and passenger use of the Bedford–Bletchley–Bicester line; and if he will make a statement. [15994]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* Officials from the Government offices for the eastern region and the south-east are represented on the steering group running the feasibility study into the reopening of the Oxford–Bletchley–Bedford–Cambridge route to passenger traffic. My Department held discussions with the consultants advising the consortium of local authorities concerned in December 1996.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the volume of freight traffic on the Bletchley to Bicester line in each year since 1993; and if he will make a statement. [15995]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* Statistical records are not kept of the tonnages of freight traffic over individual sections of railway.

The Bicester to Claydon Junction stretch of this line is currently used for the carriage of waste to a landfill site. Five trains a week operate in each direction on this section of the line.

The Claydon Junction to Bletchley stretch of the line has not been used since before 1993.

North London Railway Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received on breaches of the service agreement on the Barking to Gospel Oak branch of the North London line; and if he will make a statement. [15996]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* None. Services between Gospel Oak and Barking are provided by North London Railways Ltd. The Franchising Director announced on 7 February 1997 that he had awarded the NLR franchise to National Express Group plc but it has not yet started. Franchised services are expected to start soon, following which any breach of the franchise agreement would be a matter for the Franchising Director.

Nuclear Waste Transport

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much nuclear waste was transported by *(a)* road and *(b)* rail in (i) 1993, (ii) 1994, (iii) 1995 and (iv) 1996; and what estimate he has made of the amount in each case to be transported in 1997. [15948]

Mr. Watts *[holing answer 17 February 1997]:* Information of the kind requested is not routinely held within the Department and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Vaccine Damage (Compensation)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have received lump sum payments due to vaccine damage in each of the last 10 years. [15331]

Sir John Wheeler: The information is only available to the UK as a whole. The number of persons who have received lump sum payments due to vaccine damage for each of the last 10 years is as follows:

1986–87: 17

1987–88: 10

1988–89: 3

1989–90: 3

1990–91: 1

1991–92: 7

1992–93: 13

1993–94: 4

1994–95: 6

1995–96: 6.

Queen's University (Student Intake)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the students beginning courses at Queen's University from Northern Ireland were perceived to be *(a)* Protestant, *(b)* Roman Catholic and *(c)* of other religions in each of the last three years. [15475]

Mr. Ancram: Reliable information is not available owing to the high level of non-response to the community background question.

Livestock (Notifiable Diseases)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of cases of each notifiable disease in livestock reported in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years. [15493]

Mr. Ancram: The table lists the number of cases of each notifiable disease in livestock reported in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years:

Disease	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
BSE	333	487	363	170	82
Sheep scab	59	48	71	57	45
Warble fly	—	4	—	—	—

Disease	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Johnes disease	13	6	11	46	32
Scrapie	5	4	5	2	8
Aujesky's[1]	—	9	8	5	8
Transmissible gastro-enteritis/porcine respiratory corona virus	—	—	—	—	3
Porcine reproduction and respiratory syndrome	—	—	—	—	2
Newcastle disease	—	—	—	—	1
Salmonella (in breeding poultry)	6	1	2	6	5
Jaagiekte	1	—	1	4	2

[1] Only became notifiable in Northern Ireland in February 1993.

Union Flag

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the Union flag was not flown on 6 February at the offices of the Southern area health board, the Mall, Armagh city; what proposals there are to provide a new Union flag for this building; if the schedule of dates for flying the Union flag has been advised to the staff; if the person responsible was prepared to carry out this duty; and if he will make a statement. [15571]

Sir John Wheeler: The Armagh and Dungannon health and social services trust has advised that failure to fly the Union flag on 6 February was an oversight on its part. Action has been taken to purchase a new Union flag. The schedule of the dates for flying the Union flag has been advised to staff and the person responsible for carrying out this duty has no difficulty in fulfilling it. However, there is no requirement for the trusts to fly the Union flag on these dates, and it is at the discretion of each organisation whether the flag should be flown on those buildings occupied by their staff.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the Union flag was not flown on 6 February at the headquarters of the Southern area health board, Tower hill, Armagh city; if a Union flag has been provided for this public building; if the schedule of dates for flying the Union flag has been advised to the staff; if the person responsible was prepared to carry out this duty; and if he will make a statement. [15570]

Mr. Moss: A letter was sent to all health and social services boards on 18 November 1966 advising them of the days in 1997 on which the Union flag should be flown on central Government buildings. There is, however no requirement for the boards to fly the Union flag on these dates. It is at the discretion of each organisation whether the flag should be flown on those buildings occupied by their staff. A Union flag has been provided for the headquarters for the Southern health and social services board, Tower hill, Armagh. However, the Southern health and social services board decided to use its discretion and not fly the Union flag on its headquarters building at Tower hill on 6 February 1997.

Integrated Schools

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will list the integrated schools in Northern Ireland, with the pupil numbers and percentages of those pupils who are Roman Catholic and Protestant. [15820]

Mr. Ancram: The information requested is as follows:

School name	Enrolment (1995–96)	Roman Catholic per cent.	Protestant per cent.
A. Integrated Primary Schools			
Forge Integrated Primary School, Belfast	205	46	33
Carhill Integrated Primary, Garvagh	49	57	43
Portaferry Integrated Primary, Portaferry	54	33	54
All Children's Integrated Primary, Newcastle	167	65	20
Hazelwood Integrated Primary, Newtownabbey	348	47	31
Cranmore Integrated Primary, Belfast	100	38	35
Enniskillen Integrated Primary, Enniskillen	191	49	35
Omagh Integrated Primary, Omagh	154	58	34
Oakgrove Integrated Primary, Londonderry	295	53	30
Mill Strand Integrated Primary, Portrush	192	29	31
Braidside Integrated Primary, Ballymena	171	20	27
Corran Integrated Primary, Larne	111	48	38
Acorn Integrated Primary, Carrickfergus	123	37	58
Lough View Integrated Primary, Belfast	93	39	48
Cedar Integrated Primary, Crossgar	26	35	42
Bridge Integrated Primary, Banbridge	277	51	42
Portadown Integrated Primary, Portadown	202	51	30
Windmill Integrated Primary, Dungannon	158	47	45
Saints and Scholars Integrated Primary, Armagh	117	59	38
Hilden Integrated Primary, Lisburn[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rathenraw Integrated Primary, Lisburn[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a
B. Integrated Secondary Schools[1]			
Brownlow College, Craigavon	302	22	68
Hazelwood College, Newtownabbey	639	56	21
Oakgrove College, Londonderry	404	67	30
Erne Integrated College, Enniskillen	155	65	26
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh	85	71	29
Lagan College, Belfast	933	44	46
Shimna Integrated College, Newcastle	131	76	19
Newbridge Integrated College, Loughbrickland	74	77	23
Armagh-South Tyrone Integrated College, Dungannon	60	70	25
Slemish Integrated College, Ballymena[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a
North Coast Integrated College, Coleraine[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] Percentages may not sum to 100 per cent. as the total enrolment includes pupils in other categories, ie "other Christian"; "Non-Christian" or "No Religion".

[2] These schools opened in 1996–97 and school census data for that year is not yet available.

Civil Service

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what percentage of (i) Northern Ireland civil service and (ii) general service posts *(a)* requiring and *(b)* not requiring a degree were filled in each of the last five years. [15818]

Sir John Wheeler: The proportions of permanent, non-industrial posts filled in the Northern Ireland civil service and in the general service in each of the last five years, for which a degree was required, and for which a degree was not required, are set out in the following table:

Year	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
(i) Northern Ireland civil service					
(a) Posts filled requiring a degree	132 (8.5 per cent.)	36 (5.7 per cent.)	40 (7.4 per cent.)	117 (15.4 per cent.)	110 (12.5 per cent.)
(b) Posts filled not requiring a degree	1,422 (91.5 per cent.)	597 (94.3 per cent.)	500 (92.6 per cent.)	643 (84.6 per cent.)	768 (87.5 per cent.)
Total number of posts filled	1,554	633	540	760	898
(ii) General service					
(a) Posts filled requiring a degree	6 (0.5 per cent)	6 (1.5 per cent.)	1 (0.5 per cent.)	6 (1 per cent.)	33 (4.6 per cent.)
(b) Posts filled not requiring a degree	1,114 (99.5 per cent.)	405 ((98.5 per cent.)	196 (99.5 per cent.)	545 (99 per cent.)	677 (95.4 per cent.)
Total number of posts filled	1,120	411	197	551	710

Planning Applications

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those planning applications, by type, which have been granted for building on green belt sites in the Lisburn district council area since 1 January 1990 and the reasons for the permissions; and if he will make a statement about his policy on residential development in the Aghanahough townland. [15822]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Robert McCartney, dated 18 February 1997:

Mr Moss has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of planning permissions granted on green belt sites in the Lisburn Borough Council area since 1990, and the Department's policy on residential development in the Aghanahough townland.

A total of 750 planning permissions have been granted on green belt sites in the Lisburn Borough Council area since 1990. I hope you will appreciate that to, categorise these permissions by type and provide reasons for approval on each case, would involve a manual retrieval and scrutiny of each of the planning files involved and could only be carried out at disproportionate cost. If, however, there are any specific cases on which you require detailed reasons for approval, I would, of course, be happy to have these investigated.

The townland of Aghanahough lies partly within the development limits of Lisburn, and partly within the green belt. As regards the Department's policy for residential development within the development limit, this is set out in the Lisburn Area Plan 1982–1997, adopted in 1985, and the Lisburn Area Plan Preliminary Proposals, published in March 1996. Detailed planning policies for housing development within the green belt, are set out in the area plans referred to, and also, in the Department's publication "A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland" published in September 1993. A copy of each publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

I do hope this is helpful.

Cattle Slaughter Scheme

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's search for cattle associated with BSE cases to be culled under the terms of the Florence agreement; how many cattle have been identified so far; what is his latest estimate of the likely total; how many farms are involved; and what is his estimate of the time scale for completing this search and concluding the accelerated cull. [16319]

Mr. Ancram: At 7 February 1997 Department of Agriculture veterinary service staff had visited 121 natal herds, in which a confirmed case of BSE was born, and identified 721 animals to be culled. A further two natal herds remain to be visited. Approximately 700 animals born in the same cohort groups have moved out of the natal herds and at 10 February, 507 of these animals in 410 herds had been traced. It is anticipated that tracing and valuation of all such animals will be completed in four to six weeks. In total approximately 1,400 Northern Ireland cattle on 670 farms will be traced and identified under the selective cull. Slaughtering is expected to start at the beginning of March and it should take around six to eight weeks to complete the cull of home-bred cattle.

There are about 5,400 cattle imported from Great Britain, some of which may have to be slaughtered under the cull. While these animals are separately identified on the Northern Ireland animal health computer, and their herds of origin known, manual tracing of their movements in Great Britain will be necessary.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security Appeals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the statutory basis of the statement in leaflet NI 246 that an appellant who has not opted for an oral hearing of a social security appeal within 10 days of being asked to decide has a right to change his or her mind at any time. [11088]

Mr. Roger Evans: Regulation 22(1) of the adjudication regulations provides for the clerk to direct an appellant to notify him if he wishes an oral hearing of that appeal to be held. Regulation 22(1A) requires the appellant to provide his reply to this direction in writing within 10 days or such other period as the clerk or tribunal chairman may decide. Regulation 22(1B) requires an oral hearing to be held if the appellant has replied in accordance with Regulation 22(1A). Regulation 22(1C) allows the chairman to hold an oral hearing, whether the appellant or any other party to the appeal has so requested or not, if he is satisfied that an oral hearing is necessary to enable the tribunal to reach a decision.

Regulation 22(1A) and 22(1B) therefore provide for an oral hearing in all cases where the appellant has requested one within 10 days. The clerk or the chairman may allow longer than 10 days. No end date is specified by the regulations and I am advised that this period may extend up to the point that the decision on the appeal is issued by the tribunal. Therefore, if an appellant has not elected in the first instance for an oral hearing, or opted to have his appeal heard on the papers, he may still request an oral hearing at any time up to the point that the decision is issued. In those circumstances, the chairman may order an oral hearing.

Departmental leaflets, including the NI 246, are not a complete and authoritative statement of the law. They are written in plain English and are intended to provide sufficient information and advice in language that will be understood by the majority of the population. Some representations have been received about the content and format of the new NI 246, and these will be taken into account before the leaflet is next reprinted. Current plans are for a reprint during April 1997.

Incomes

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the mean and *(b)* the median income for (i) single men aged 65 to 74, (ii) single men aged 75 and over, (iii) single women aged 65 to 74, (iv) single women aged 75 and over, (v) pensioner couples aged 65 to 74 and (vi) pensioner couples aged 75 years and over, (1) for 1979 in 1994–95 prices and (2) for 1994–95. [12991]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

	Mean income £	*Median income £*
Single men aged 65 to 74		
1979	93.20	76.90
1994–95	125.50	103.40
Single men aged 75 and over		
1979	79.90	70.20
1994–95	148.10	103.80
Single women aged 65–74		
1979	73.40	66.60
1994–95	122.10	97.50
Single women aged 75 and over		
1979	71.10	66.50
1994–95	108.40	95.70
Pensioner couples aged 65–74		
1979	153.60	127.00
1994–95	225.80	185.00
Pensioner couples aged 75 and over		
1979	125.00	107.00
1994–95	217.00	169.00

Notes:

1. All figures are given in 1994–95 prices and rounded to the nearest 10p.

2. A pensioner couple is defined as a couple where the man, defined as the head, is over the state pension age. The age ranges quoted for pensioner couples are for the age of the head of the couple.

Source:

Pensioners' Incomes Series 1979 and 1994–95.

Benefit Upratings

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will estimate the cost in 1997–98 of uprating (1) the £3,000 lower capital limit for income support for *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* all recipients of income support to (i) £8,000 and (ii) £16,000 and (2) the £8,000 upper capital limit for income support for *(A)* pensioners, *(B)* all recipients of income support to *(x)* £16,000 and *(y)* £20,000; [14288]

(2) if he will estimate the number of pensioners who would become eligible for income support if *(a)* the £3,000 capital limit was increased to (i) £8,000, (ii) £16,000 and (iii) £10,000 and *(b)* the £8,000 upper capital limit was increased to (i) £16,000 and (ii) £20,000. [14290]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table. The table also shows the number of pensioners who would become eligible for income support if these changes were made.

		Cost in 1997–98 £ million		*Number of claimants aged 60 or over becoming entitled to income support*
Lower limit £	*Upper limit £*	*If applied to all claimants*	*If applied to all claimants aged 60 or over*	
3,000	16,000	50	40	20,000
3,000	20,000	50	40	20,000
8,000	16,000	200	170	135,000
8,000	20,000	210	170	135,000
10,000	16,000	240	200	160,000

Lower limit £	Upper limit £	Cost in 1997–98 £ million: If applied to all claimants	Cost in 1997–98 £ million: If applied to all claimants aged 60 or over	Number of claimants aged 60 or over becoming entitled to income support
10,000	20,000	250	210	165,000
16,000	20,000	310	260	210,000

1. Estimated using the 1994–95 family resources survey, uprated to 1997–98 case loads and benefit levels.

2. Estimates assume that the combinations will include an upper and lower capital limit.

3. Estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes.

4. Estimates include consequential costs in housing benefit and council tax benefit from new income support claimants being "passported" onto these benefits.

5. Estimates for all claimants include the costs of introducing the same capital limits in jobseeker's allowance.

6. Adjustments to these estimates are made using the May 1995 income support quarterly statistical inquiry and the May 1995 housing benefit–council tax benefit management information system.

7. Cost estimates are rounded to the nearest £10 million, claimants to the nearest 5,000.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1997–98 of reducing the assumed income from savings for *(a)* pensioners and *(b)* all recipients of income support, with savings between £3,000 and £8,000, to (i) £1 a week for every £500 over £3,000 and (ii) £1 a week for every £1,000 over £3,000. [14289]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Tariff income rule	Cost in income support and jobseeker's allowance in 1997–98 (£ million): Pensioners	Cost in income support and jobseeker's allowance in 1997–98 (£ million): All claimants
£1 for every £500 above the lower capital limit	20	30
£1 for every £1,000 above the lower capital limit	40	50

1. Estimated using the 1994–95 family resources survey, uprated to 1997–98 case loads and benefit levels.

2. Estimates exclude cases in residential care and nursing homes.

3. Estimates include consequential costs in housing benefit and council tax benefit from new income support claimants being "passported" onto these benefits.

4. Estimates for all claimants include the costs of introducing the same capital limits in jobseeker's allowance.

5. Adjustments to these estimates are made using the May 1995 income support quarterly statistical inquiry and the May 1995 housing benefit–council tax benefit management information system.

6. Estimates are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost in 1997–98 of increasing all capital limits for income-related benefits for pensioner couples to one and a half times their current limits. [14291]

Mr. Evans: The estimated cost if all capital limits for income-related benefits for pensioner couples are increased to one and a half times their current limits is £30 million in 1997–98.

Notes:

1. This is estimated using the 1994–95 family resources survey, uprated to 1997–98 case loads and benefit levels.
2. The estimate excludes cases in residential care and nursing homes.
3. The estimate covers income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit and family credit.
4. Adjustments to this estimate are made using the May 1995 income support quarterly statistical inquiry and the May 1995 housing benefit—council tax benefit management information system.
5. The estimate is rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of benefit fraud in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what estimate he has made of the likely savings which will accrue from the initiative "Spotlight on Benefit Cheats". [14696]

Mr. Heald: The overall annual level of detected and undetected benefit fraud is currently estimated at approximately £4 billion.

Phase I of the spotlight campaigns, which ran from April to September 1996, generated more than £44 million in benefit savings. Phase II, which ran during November 1996, has generated £40.4 million. Phase III began on 3 February 1997.

Earnings Top-up

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of the earnings top-up during its piloting stage; and if he will estimate the annual costs of a national scheme. [15073]

Mr. Roger Evans: The earnings top-up pilot is expected to cost a total of £65 million over three years. Two benefit rates—scheme A and scheme B—will test how different amounts of earnings top-up influence the decision to take up and remain in work. Present estimates indicate that the annual cost of a national scheme will be £265 million—scheme A—and £595 million—scheme B—at 1996–97 prices. These estimates would be subject to review as information on the effects of the benefit are collected and analysed during the pilot.

Earnings Disregards

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining and *(b)* the cost of assessing, earnings and earnings limits over a quarterly period in respect of (i) the weekly disregards in income-related benefits, and (ii) the weekly earnings limits applicable to contributory and non-contributory benefits. [15076]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available.

Student Loans

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the numbers gaining and *(b)* the cost of treating a student loan as capital in claims for (i) income support and (ii) jobseeker's allowance. [15080]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons the Child Support Agency has reduced the range of statistical information it makes available. [15120]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Miss Liz Lynne, dated 17 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the provision by the Child Support Agency of statistical information.

I am unclear why you should have the impression that the range of statistical information available has been reduced. If anything, the reverse is true, with more statistical information on the Agency's work now available than was previously the case, and with enhancements to the Child Support Computer System making more specific data available.

Although now published quarterly rather than monthly, the House of Commons Library Report produced by the Agency carries the same data as before, The Quarterly Statistical Summary produced by the Analytical Services Department now draws information from a larger sample, thereby improving the quality of the results, and contains more information than earlier editions. Monthly statistics on the Agency's performance against Charter Standards are to be displayed in our offices.

As you will be aware, the Government has published a code of practice on access to Government information. The Agency is committed to the principles of this code, and will make information readily available whenever this is possible.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedures are in place at the Child Support Agency to ensure that all complaints by clients are counted; and what instructions are given to staff regarding the definition, recognition, registration and counting of complaints. [15086]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Miss Liz Lynne, dated 17 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about complaints tot he Child Support Agency.

The new CSA Charter advises clients how to complain if they are dissatisfied with the service they have received from the Agency. Each of our offices has a Customer Service Manager to whom clients can speak or write to about a complaint.

Systems are in place for defining, recording, recognising, registering and counting client's complaints across the Agency and the information is collated and monitored on a monthly basis. Where there have been vexatious complaint campaigns orchestrated by organisations who oppose the implementation of Child Support legislation, staff have been instructed not to register these as bona fide complaints.

Improving the handling of client's complaints is one of the key priorities for the Child Support Agency. During 1996, the Agency set up a review of its internal procedures for dealing with complaints in order to bring them into line with the Citizen's Charter Complaints Taskforce recommendations.

As a result, a number of improvements have been identified including the revision of training for all staff involved in dealing with client's complaints and the introduction of a new Complaints Guide which sets out the Agency's policy and procedures for the speedy and effective handling of client's complaints. The revised arrangements are currently being piloted in one of our Agency business units and will be fully evaluated prior to adoption Agency-Wide.

I hope this is helpful.

Benefits (Expenditure)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of annual social security expenditure on each benefit. [15074]

Mr. Burt: Detailed breakdowns of total expenditure figures are made available in the Social Security departmental report. This will be published in March 1997.

Income Support

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the number gaining and *(b)* the cost of extending payments of income support to those under age 19 years who qualify by virtue of being in relevant education to a period beyond their 19th birthday which is (i) the date of the end of the course and (ii) the terminal date. [15078]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Income Support (Child Maintenance)

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have lost entitlement to income support benefit as a result of child maintenance payments to them resulting from action taken by the Child Support Agency as recorded by form 646 during the months of October, November and December 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15942]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Mrs. Margaret Beckett, dated 17 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security regarding cessation of Income Support as a result of Child Support Agency action on form 646.

The form used to notify the Benefits Agency of the amount and the commencement date of regular child maintenance is form CSA 676(A). This form has a tear-off facility to allow the Benefits Agency to inform the Child Support Agency of the outcome of the reassessment of Income Support, including cases where Income Support ceases.

In such cases, where the absent parent is to make payments of maintenance via the Child Support Agency, the Benefits Agency contacts the Agency to ensure that maintenance payments have started before payments of Income Support cease. In cases where the absent parent is to pay maintenance directly to the parent with care any failure to pay the agreed amount of maintenance is reported to the Benefits Agency and the Child Support Agency.

The number of cases where the Benefits Agency has notified the Agency that Income Support has ceased is as follows:

October 1996: 147

November 1996: 153

December 1996: 95

I hope this is helpful.

War Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, (1) pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, columns *635–36*, what steps he has taken to investigate the reasons for his Department's medical advisers' delay in providing advice relating to the additive nature of age-related hearing loss; and when sensorineural hearing loss was introduced for war pension purposes; [15857]

(2) on what date the medical opinion on which his Department based its policy relating to sensorineural hearing loss for the purposes of war pensions prior to March 1996 was received; and from whom. [15862]

Mr. Heald: The war pensions scheme has no list of prescribed conditions. It has always been possible for a claim to be made for any disablement, including noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss.

Prior to 1996, the assessment of noise-induced hearing loss claims was based on advice from departmental medical officers given in December 1992. The approach taken following that advice was investigated during 1995 and 1996. The medical adviser who undertook the investigation concluded that, from 1 March 1996, there could no longer be any doubt that the general medical opinion was that age and noise-related hearing loss were no more than additive.

The 1995–96 investigation did not include an examination of whether the advice given by previous medical advisers in 1992 was reasonable at the time it was given. This question was investigated following the statement by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf's and the Royal British Legion's medical experts that the fact that noise and age-related hearing loss were no more than additive had been known for 30 years. That investigation has revealed that the advice given in 1992 was not scientifically based.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what medical conditions, in respect of which war pensions are payable, are not recompensed for deterioration; and what assessment he has made of the methods of evaluation of deterioration in respect of each such condition. [15858]

Mr. Heald: A war pension may be awarded for any condition which is attributable to or aggravated by service. Any subsequent deterioration of that condition may also be compensated, providing the deterioration is due to service. Deterioration wholly unconnected with service cannot be compensated for under the war pensions scheme. Each case is considered on its individual circumstances and merits.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the changes in medical opinion of which his Department's advisers informed Ministers relating to noise-induced hearing loss in the last five years. [15859]

Mr. Heald: The only occasion in the past five years on which Ministers have been advised of a change in medical opinion on noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss was in October 1996 when Ministers were advised that it had been shown beyond reasonable doubt that the effects of noise and age-related hearing loss were no more than additive.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *635*, on the open letter sent to the Minister of State, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish, on sensorineural hearing loss and war pensions, what reply he has sent to the letter; if he will publish that reply; and if he will make a statement. [15861]

Mr. Heald: In response to the letter from Professors Lutman and Davies, my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish the Minister of State, has arranged to meet the Royal British Legion and its medical advisors on 12 March to discuss any remaining differences.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to disregard income from a personal pension for people with reserved rights who have a spouse living in the family home. [16741]

Mr. Roger Evans: Regulations are being amended with effect from 7 April 1997 so that 50 per cent. of the income from a personal pension or retirement annuity contract will be disregarded where a resident of a residential care or nursing home with preserved rights to income support, or income-based jobseeker's allowance, passes at least half of their pension or annuity income to a spouse living at home. A similar disregard for occupational pensions was introduced in April 1996.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the implementation of the recommendations by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council concerning chronic bronchitis and emphysema. [16742]

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in November 1996 that the Government would implement, in full, the recommendations made by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council to change the qualifying conditions for the award of disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema—Cm 3240. Good progress has been made in the meantime, and I can now announce that we will be able to bring the changes into operation from 9 April. These changes will make it more straightforward for coal miners who are disabled by these diseases to qualify for benefit, and easier to administer the scheme.

The Benefits Agency has undertaken extensive planning to implement these changes efficiently and as soon as practicable. Arrangements are in hand to publicise the change locally in a way that will target the communities most affected and use the means most likely to reach the people concerned.

People making claims under the new arrangements are advised to do so from the beginning of April, but not before. We expect a relatively small number of Benefits Agency offices to receive a large number of claims over a short period of time. Inevitably, this work will take some time to process, however, arrangements will be put in place to inform people who claim of progress from written acknowledgment of the claim through to decision and, where appropriate, payment. Successful claims made at the right time will be paid with effect from 9 April.

A new edition of leaflet N17 "People who have worked underground in a coal mine for 20 years" will be available in English and Welsh in social security offices from April. Revised claim forms will also be available.

The Benefits Agency is contacting mining organisations, GPs and citizen advice bureaux in mining areas to ensure that everyone is informed. Administration of claims will be simplified wherever possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Tenancies

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of farm business tenancies entered into to date. [15491]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My Department is currently analysing data on the uptake of farm business tenancies under a new annual survey of tenanted land. This survey was launched in October last year and the results are expected to be published in March 1997.

BSE

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total cost to public funds of the BSE crisis in Britain since 20 March 1996 broken down by category; and what proportion of this total he estimates will be recovered from the European Community. [15489]

Mrs. Browning: For details of the cost of the BSE crisis, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 3 February 1997, *Official Report*, column 513. The proportion of this cost to be recovered from the EU is estimated at approximately 45 per cent.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total amount paid in compensation to the beef industry in Britain for price damage since 20 March 1996. [15488]

Mr. Baldry: Compensation is not paid to the beef industry for price damage. For details of expenditure on BSE eradication and compensation schemes, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Palriamentary Secretary on 3 February 1997, *Official Report*, column 513.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle have been slaughtered to date under the over-30 months scheme; and what is the average amount per cow paid in compensation to farmers. [15486]

Mr. Baldry: More than 1.25 million cattle have now been slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme. For an average cull cow weighing 560 kg, the amount paid to producers, depending on the date on which the animal was slaughtered, is:

	£
3 May 1996 to 30 June 1996	479.64
1 July 1996 to 20 October 1996	466.93
21 October 1996 to 31 October 1996	420.22
1 November 1996 to 31 January 1997	408.18
1 February 1997 to	387.18

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on *(a)* farmers' incomes and *(b)* the economy of rural areas of the European ban on beef exports. [15478]

Mr. Boswell: The European Union ban on exports of UK beef, together with the fall in consumption on the UK market, is estimated to have reduced the value of UK cattle sales by approximately £800 million in 1996. However, this reduction in revenue has been largely offset by measures put in place by the Government to assist the industry.

The Ministry is commissioning an independent study to provide a comprehensive assessment of the economic impact of BSE across the whole UK economy and within particular regions.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for a further selective cull based on the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee's report on maternal transmission. [15882]

Mr. Baldry: SEAC has asked for more work to be done regarding the study on maternal transmission before making final recommendations to the Government. We shall consider the implications for the selective cull once we have SEAC's advice.

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of confirmed cases of BSE in each month in 1995 to 1996. [15873]

Mrs. Browning: The following table shows the monthly breakdown of confirmed BSE cases for 1995 to 1996:

	1995	*1996*
January	1,720	920
February	2,035	1,192
March	1,629	847
April	1,173	592
May	1,403	629
June	1,232	1,026
July	1,266	801
August	1,094	541
September	956	655
October	1,054	673
November	1,107	594
December	784	268

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the number of carcases of slaughtered cattle currently in container ships awaiting disposal. [16529]

Mr. Baldry: None.

Rabies

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the reliability of blood tests for rabies antibodies subsequent to vaccination. [15639]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Under the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) Order 1974, as amended in particular by the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) (Amendment) Order 1994, dogs and cats which are the subject of a commercial transaction may be imported into the United Kingdom from another EU member state provided that they have, inter alia, been tested for antibodies using a

"serological test carried out in accordance with World Health Organisation specifications".

The test commonly used by laboratories throughout the EU is the rapid fluorescent focus inhibition test. This test is based on a World Health Organisation specification, but has undergone a number of modifications over the years in different laboratories. A revised protocol which should overcome problems with test result variability has now been submitted for ratification following a detailed collaborative study between a number of EU laboratories.

Waste Disposal at Sea

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's definition of bulky waste in respect of disposal at sea. [15627]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today in response to his question to the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *43*, when he expects the information on birds involved in outbreaks of Newcastle disease and the total amount of compensation paid to be available. [15724]

Mrs Browning: The total amount of compensation to be paid as a result of the recent outbreaks of Newcastle disease is dependant on information to be supplied by the claimants involved and our consideration of their claims. The claims will be processed as quickly as possible.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations his Department has received since 1 January 1996, relating to application forms allegedly completed and sent, but not received by his Department for *(a)* sheep annual premium and *(b)* other grants administered by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [16168]

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is not held centrally and could be extracted locally only at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Escort Services

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what procedures exist to monitor the number of hours worked in one session of work by drivers employed by firms contracted to carry out prison escort services; [15153]

(2) what checks are carried out on the *(a)* health and *(b)* character of drivers employed by firms contracted to carry out prison escort services; and what procedures are used to monitor these factors; [15151]

(3) what limits are placed on the number of hours worked per shift by drivers employed by firms contracted to carry out prison escort services. [15150]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about drivers employed by private sector companies who are responsible for escorting prisoners.

Most prisoner movements under escort are to and from court and are now virtually all undertaken by specialist court escort contractors.

The contracts require full compliance with the provisions of relevant Road Traffic and Road Safety legislation. Each company is required to hold an Operator's Licence and its procedures and records are subject to inspection by the Department of Transport. There is no additional routine inspection by court escort monitors of the hours worked by drivers or of their shift patterns although such records must be made available on request.

The health of drivers is primarily a matter for the contractor, both on recruitment and subsequently, although again there is an overriding requirement to comply with all relevant legislation. Drivers of the larger vehicles must hold Passenger Carrying Vehicle Licences (PCVs).

Drivers employed by companies contracted to provide a court escort service must be certificated as Prisoner Custody Officers under the Criminal Justice Act 1991. This involves such enquiries as are deemed necessary into the background and character of each applicant. Without such certification employment cannot commence. The provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act do not apply.

There are also contracts issued for the provision of vehicles and drivers for the transportation of prisoners for other purposes. These too reflect the need to comply with all appropriate legislation.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each current contract for prison escort services indicating *(a)* the company, *(b)* the value of the contract, *(c)* its area of operation and *(d)* its duration. [15152]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the costs and duration of contracts for prison escort services.

The information requested is shown in the table attached. This relates only to those contracts for the movement of prisoners to and from court. Contracts for the provision of vehicles and drivers for other prisoner movements under the escort of prison officers are let locally by each establishment and details could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

Area		*Contractor*	*Start*	*Final phase*	*End*[1]	*Value*[2] *£ million*
1	South Wales and south-west England	Reliance custodial services	1 April 1996	1 October 1996	30 September 2003	60
2	South and south-east England	Premier prison services	6 May 1996	1 November 1996	31 October 2003	61
3	London Metropolitan	Securicor custodial services	1 June 1994	26 June 1995	30 June 1999	[3]92
4	East Anglia	Group 4 court services	1 July 1995	1 January 1996	31 December 2000	42
5	West Midlands and central Wales	Group 4 court services	3 June 1996	2 December 1996	1 December 2003	51
6	North Wales and north-west England	Group 4 court services	7 August 1995	5 February 1996	4 February 2001	65
7	East Midlands and Humberside	Group 4 court services	5 April 1993	—[4]	4 April 1998	[5]45
8	North England	Group 4 court services	7 April 1997	7 July 1998	6 July 2004	[6]49

Notes:
[1] This is the end date for the contract, however, all contracts include options for an extension up to a maximum duration of 14 years.
[2] The value is the estimated total value for the initial duration of the contract based on first year prices.
[3] The value of the Securicor contract for area 3 takes account of a re-resourcing activity which took place before the end of phase 1.
[4] The area 7 contract was not phased in, full operation commenced on the start date.
[5] Area 7 was the first contract and included a facility for the resource levels to be reassessed after implementation. The value takes account of this re-resourcing exercise.
[6] The area 8 contract includes a non mandatory option for establishments to utilise the contract for external movements. The value detailed above includes an estimated cost for external movements.

Criminal Records

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the voluntary sector regarding proposals in the Police Bill [*Lords*] to charge volunteers for access to criminal record checks; and if he will make a statement. [15149]

Mr. Maclean: We have received many representations from the voluntary sector about the charging of fees for criminal record checks.

In response to these representations, my right hon. and learned Friend announced to the House, during Second Reading of the Police Bill [*Lords*] on 12 February, that we shall seek to amend the Bill to introduce an order-making power to enable free checks to be provided for specific groups, such as volunteers, when the money could be made available to cover the costs.

Prison Medical Service

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the expenditure on the prison medical service from each year since 1990 *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* in standard price terms based on the current year and *(c)* in cash and standard prices per head of the prison population; and what is the planned expenditure for future years under the same headings. [15234]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about expenditure on the prison medical service each year since 1990 and how much we plan to spend in future years.

Expenditure on health care has been devolved to prison establishments. Governors allocate appropriate resources from within their establishment budgets, to ensure that health care is delivered to prisoners in accordance with set standards. For this reason it is not possible accurately to differentiate health care staff costs from the overall Prison Service budget nor to forecast precise future expenditure. Estimated expenditure for health care for the years 1990/91–1994/95 (the last year for which such an estimate was made) are set out in the attached table. The figures given are at 1994/95 prices.

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Estimated expenditure £ million (1994–95 prices)	54.764	58.217	58.403	58.215	59.269
Average per inmate	0.00123	0.00129	0.00133	0.00127	0.00120

Prison Deaths

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many self-inflicted deaths occurred in HM prisons in each year from 1990 to 1993 *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head of the prison population. [15393]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter form Richard Tilt to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of self inflicted deaths at prison establishments in each year from 1990 to 1993.

The figures on self inflicted deaths are given below. Self inflicted deaths do not necessarily conclude with a verdict of suicide.

Calendar year	*Total self inflicted deaths*	*Average population*	*Rate of self inflicted deaths per 100,000 population*
1990	50	44,975	111
1991	42	44,809	94
1992	41	44,719	92
1993	47	44,552	105

Surveillance Equipment

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for warrants for the interception of telephone calls have been *(a)* submitted, *(b)* approved by officials in the Home Office, *(c)* signed by the Secretary of State and *(d)* cancelled or revoked after issue for each year since the introduction of the Interception of Communications Act 1985; and what other information he collects to assess (i) the extent and need for warrants and (ii) the time taken by officials and the Secretary of State to carry out these functions. [15436]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the annexes to the reports of the interception of communications commissioner for 1989 and 1995 Cm 1063 and 3254, copies of which are in the Library. Together, these provide figures for the number of warrants issued by the Secretary of State during each of the years from 1985 to 1995 and the number in force at the end of each year. Warrants are cancelled when they are no longer considered necessary. None have been quashed under section 7(5) of the Act. The information requested at *(a)* and *(b)* is not available.

The extent and need for warrants is manifest in the detailed cases which are presented in support of the applications. One grade 7, one higher executive officer, two executive officers, one administrative officer and one typist are engaged on case work under the 1985 Act. Member of the senior civil service are also involved in the consideration of applications and I, or in my absence another Secretary of State, personally consider and decide upon applications submitted to my office.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about conditions in the special secure unit at Her Majesty's prison, Belmarsh; and if he will make a statement.[15242]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Chris Mullin, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about what representations have been received about conditions in the Special Secure Unit (SSU) at Belmarsh.

The Prison Service answers many queries from Members of Parliament, prisoners and the general public about conditions in the SSU at Belmarsh prison. The four main issues raised relate to time out of cell, alleged discrimination, visiting arrangements and medical treatment.

Learmont Inquiry

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the outstanding recommendations made in the report of the Learmont inquiry. [15970]

Miss Widdecombe: On 24 July 1996, I published an interim progress report which contained details of the conclusions reached and actions taken or planned by the Director General of the Prison Service in response to 100 of Sir John Learmont's recommendations.

On 15 January 1997, the director general announced the implementation of a further 11 recommendations. Details were given in a report which was placed in the Library.

Of the remaining 16 recommendations, 11 are the subject of a cost-benefit analysis to determine their operational effectiveness and value for money, and five are subject to further review or evaluation of pilot schemes.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* unconvicted remand prisoners and *(b)* convicted but unsentenced remand prisoners had been held for (i) less than six months; (ii) between six and 12 months, (iii) between one year and three years and (iv) over three years since first reception into the Prison Service for each month since January 1995. [15984]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many (a) unconvicted remand prisoners and (b) convicted but unsentenced remand prisoners had been held for (i) less than six months; (ii) between six and twelve months; (iii) between one year and three years and (iv) over three years since first reception into the Prison Service for each month since January 1995.

The information requested is not available on a monthly basis, nor at the level of detail requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average amount of time spent in prison by *(a)* unconvicted remand prisoners and *(b)* convicted but unsentenced prisoners in each month since January 1995. [15985]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what was the average amount of time spent in prison by (a) unconvicted remand prisoners and (b) convicted unsentenced prisoners in each month since January 1995.

The information requested is contained in the attached table.

	Untried	*Convicted unsentenced*
1995		
January	58	37
February	54	34
March	53	33
April	66	37
May	55	30
June	53	34
July	54	32
August	53	32
September	53	34
October	53	34
November	51	33
December	62	37
1996		
January	50	31
February	51	33
March	58	36
April	49	34
May	47	34
June	57	35
July	48	31
August	54	37
September	51	37
October	50	40
November	54	46
December	57	57

Average days in custody are subject to wide variation because of the small populations on which they are based. All values are provisional.

Closed Circuit Television

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of CCTV schemes in each city in South Yorkshire which are currently in operation; and what assessment he has made of the effect of each scheme on crime rates. [15704]

Mr. Maclean: In the two Home Office closed circuit television challenge competitions which have so far been held, six schemes in South Yorkshire have been awarded grants. They are:

Grimethorpe village, Barnsley (awarded £116,000);

Scawsby community centre, Brodsworth (£4,250);

The community and educational campus, Dinnington (£72,500);

Balby Street school, Doncaster (£5,000);

Clifton Comprehensive and Coleridge junior and infant schools, Rotherham (£37,850); and

Lower Don industrial area, Sheffield (£53,000).

Grimethorpe village and the community and educational campus are not yet operational. The local police report that the other four schemes have all had a significant impact on crime.

Although information about CCTV systems in which the Home Office has no involvement is not collected systematically, we are aware that town centre CCTV systems are operational in Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. The local police report that these schemes have also resulted in significant reductions in crime.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the timetable of events, with dates, connected with the successful application for funding the installation of CCTV in Dartford town centre, by the Dartford borough council; what sums were awarded to the borough council; and when the project was completed. [15864]

Mr. Maclean: A bid from a partnership led by Dartford borough council for funds to install closed circuit television in Dartford town centre was submitted in the first CCTV challenge competition in January 1995. Some £50,000 was awarded in March 1995. The first phase of the system—12 cameras—became operational in July 1996. The second phase—a further nine cameras—became operational in September 1996.

Court Adjournments

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve liaison between the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, defence solicitors, the courts and the probation service, with particular reference to reducing the number of court adjournments. [15788]

Mr. Maclean: The Government have taken many steps to improve liaison between all agencies within the criminal justice system, both nationally and locally. The work of the inter-agency trials issues group includes considering specific criminal justice system matters involving relations between the police, prosecution, courts and others. A total of 42 local inter-agency groups support the work of TIG.

The Criminal Justice Consultative Council, chaired by Lord Justice Rose and comprising members of all criminal justice agencies and the legal professions, also promotes better understanding, co-operation and co-ordination in the criminal justice system. Its work is underpinned at local level by 23 area criminal justice liaison committees.

Following discussion at a recent CJCC meeting, the Magistrates Association and the Justices Clerks Society issued a joint statement on speedier sentencing of young offenders. It deals specifically with multiple offending and guides that courts should sentence for the offences before it rather than wait for all further alleged offences to come to trial.

Prison Population

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average yearly prison population since 1987. [15982]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to HM Prison Service dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what was the average yearly population since 1987.

The average prison population in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for each year since 1987 was as follows:

1987: 48,426
1988: 48,872
1989: 48,500
1990: 44,975
1991: 44,809
1992: 44,719
1993: 44,552
1994: 48,621
1995: 50,962
1996: 55,281.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the prison population for each month since January 1995; [15981]

(2) how many *(a)* unconvicted remand prisoners and *(b)* convicted but unsentenced remand prisoners there were in each month since January 1995. [15983]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr George Howarth, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions asking if he will list the prison population for each month since January 1995; and also, how many (a) unconvicted remand prisoners and (b) convicted but unsentenced remand prisoners there were in each months since January 1995.

The information requested is contained in the attached table.

Prison population in England and Wales[1], each month since January 1995

	Total	Untried	Convicted unsentenced
1995			
January	49,542	9,025	3,498
February	50,571	8,666	3,180
March	51,594	8,239	3,009
April	50,787	8,259	2,671
May	50,643	8,455	2,727
June	51,084	7,950	3,106
July	51,279	8,147	2,793
August	51,265	8,396	2,912
September	52,286	8,162	3,016
October	52,027	8,433	3,068
November	52,540	8,337	3,047
December	49,949	8,155	2,421
1996			
January	51,947	8,345	3,196
February	53,178	8,223	3,228
March	53,740	7,933	3,079
April	54,202	8,153	3,266
May	54,513	8,209	3,110
June	55,256	8,432	3,136
July	56,141	8,379	3,182
August	55,537	8,398	3,280
September	56,628	8,523	3,440
October	57,764	8,630	3,524
November	58,126	8,687	3,460
December	56,351	8,579	2,956

[1] Figures include those held in police cells. This ended in June 1995.

Fire Service (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were working in the fire service in Lancashire in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1979. [16155]

Mr. Sackville: Information on the staffing of fire brigades is published in the annual reports of Her Majesty's chief inspector of fire services. The reports in question are for 1978 (Cm 7605, page 55) and 1995–96 (Cm 3493, page 14)—copies of which are in the Library.

Police Computer Systems

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to harmonise computer systems throughout police forces in England and Wales. [15786]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend launched the national strategy for police information systems—NSPIS—in November 1994. A principal aim of this blueprint agreed with the police service is the development of common, compatible computer systems for use by all police forces. Such systems will make a significant contribution to operational effectiveness, reduce police paperwork and provide better value for money. The first NSPIS application—vehicle procedures—is now available. Other systems currently being developed within the strategy are for:

Custody
Case preparation
Command and control
Crime reporting
Management information
Large major inquiries (HOLMES)
National legal database.

Mandatory Drug Tests

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mandatory drug tests were carried out on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays; and how many tests were performed in total in each month since weekend testing began. [15975]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of mandatory drug tests carried out on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Mandatory drug testing (MDT) data are not held in a form which allows us readily to provide the information requested.

In addition, a number of errors have come to light concerning the MDT data. Independent research has been commissioned to investigate these errors and it may take a little while before we are able to provide detailed figures, in which we have full confidence.

However, I should like to stress that we do not anticipate the effect of these errors to be particularly large on the overall statistics. Bearing in mind these commetns we can give an estimate for random mandatory drug tests carried out on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Around 6,100 such tests were conducted in the period between 1 April 1996 and 31 October 1996, out of an estimated total of 32,000 random tests undertaken.

Court Cases (Bail)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to ensure that if a person appears before a court in England or Wales *(a)* the police and *(b)* the court will be made aware of outstanding (i) bail and (ii) breaches of bail in another court. [15785]

Mr. Maclean: The Government recognise the importance of accurate and timely information about bail to enable the police and the courts to make appropriate decisions. The inter-agency bail issues steering group, which we reconvened last summer, is examining what practical steps can be taken to improve information flows. Under the group's direction, work is nearing completion on an assessment of the impact of the changes made by the bail process project, which we set up to assess and enhance the flow of information between the criminal justice agencies. The results will be published in due course.

A30–A303 Roadworks

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the costs to date to *(a)* the Devon and Cornwall police and *(b)* other police authorities of policing the road construction on the A30–A303 between Exeter and Honiton. [15927]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the chief constable that Devon and Cornwall constabulary's costs to date are estimated to be in the region of £750,000. No costs have been incurred by other police authorities.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received reporting trespass on *(a)* privately owned land and *(b)* publicly owned land in the vicinity of the A30–A303 Exeter–Honiton road works. [15929]

Mr. Maclean: None.

Police (Information Technology)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve the efficiency of the police through the use of information technology. [15787]

Mr. Maclean: Part IV of the Police Bill contains provisions to establish the police information technology organisation as an executive non-departmental public body. This new independent tripartite framework will lead to the improved delivery of cost-effective, responsive and timely information technology services to the police.

PITO is responsible for promoting the delivery of national police information services and taking forward the national strategy for police information systems—NSPIS—by co-ordinating the development of local information technology systems. Local computer applications being developed under NSPIS, enhancements to the police national computer and major projects to provide the next generation of automated fingerprint identification and radio systems are amongst the PITO programmes which will improve efficiency and ensure that information technology is fully harnessed in the fight against crime.

Serious Criminal Offences

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his current estimate of the average number of people each week involved for the first time in a serious criminal offence; and what was the equivalent figure in 1987. [15839]

Mr. Maclean: Information routinely available centrally relates to the number convicted of a standard list offence for the first time.

The latest available figures are for 1994, when the estimated weekly average for such convictions was 2,300. The equivalent figure for 1987 was 2,900.

Offences included in the "standard list" are given in appendices 4 and 5 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1995" (Cm 3421).

These include all indictable and some of the more serious summary offences.

Prisoners (Report and Health)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the report by Sir Donald Acheson on the health of prisoners to be published. [15702]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Chris Smith, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the report by Sir Donald Acheson on the health of prisoners.

The Prison Service asked Sir Donald Acheson to examine what effect, if any, the regime in the Special Secure Units at Belmarsh, Full Sutton and Whitemoor, might have on the health of prisoners held there and to report any findings to the Director of Security. Sir Donald presented his report in June 1996.

The report was commissioned internally and was not intended for publication. We have however provided copies on request and I attach a copy for your information.

The Prison Service has considered the report and taken careful note of its findings and recommendations (which are essentially based on what might result from a prolonged period of detention in an SSU rather than findings of present harm). We have made a number of amendments to procedures and will ensure that the general health of prisoners detained in SSUs is reviewed at regular intervals.

Crime Prevention (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures of crime prevention have been initiated by his Department in Lancashire since 1992. [16148]

Mr. Maclean: Apart from the benefit it has derived from the wide variety of national initiatives designed to promote crime prevention, Lancashire has received £464,000 in specific funding for closed circuit television systems.

Police Numbers (West Yorkshire)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the number of police officers per thousand people in each of the last two years in West Yorkshire. [16042]

Mr. Maclean: The information, based on police strengths as at 30 September and the latest population figure (June 1995), is as follows:

	Police officers per 1,000 of population
1995	2.43
1996	2.45

Prevention of Terrorism Legislation

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the report from Mr. J. J. Rowe QC on the operation in 1996 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989; and if he will make a statement. [16841]

Mr. Howard: I have today arranged for copies of Mr. Rowe's report to be placed in the Library. Mr. Rowe recommends that the legislation should be renewed in its entirety for a further 12 months. This is also the Government's view and a draft order to give effect to this is being laid before the House today.

Data Protection

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has in respect of enforced subject access under the Data Protection Act 1984. [16853]

Mr. Sackville: The Government recognise the objections in principle to enforced subject access. However, this problem cannot be resolved through the Police Bill because the practice affects not only police records but many social security records and possibly others. Therefore, we intend to include a general solution in the legislation giving effect to the data protection directive. We will first consult employers' organisations and others likely to be affected.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the number of convictions for *(a)* violent crime, *(b)* car crime, *(c)* serious crime and *(d)* in total, in each year since 1979 for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [13202]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 30 January 1997]:* The information is given in the table.

Number of offenders convicted, at all courts, for certain crimes 1979 to 1995

England and Wales

	Offence description			
Year	*Violent Crime*[1]	*Car Crime*[2]	*Serious Crime*[3]	*Total crime*[4]
1979	60,581	45,739	412,346	1,898,152
1980	65,123	48,330	455,425	2,211,707
1981	62,901	47,067	464,562	2,104,629
1982	63,876	46,661	475,131	2,031,043
1983	62,833	41,280	461,023	2,095,529
1984	58,496	37,651	449,449	1,962,996
1985	58,564	37,821	443,936	1,910,917
1986	53,201	35,048	384,209	1,894,209
1987	58,925	35,214	[5]397,053	[5]1,605,281
1988	65,450	32,735	[5]396,694	[5]1,604,903
1989	70,890	29,836	[5]348,833	[5]1,583,530
1990	69,215	30,252	[5]352,057	[5]1,562,663
1991	63,599	30,472	[5]346,808	[5]1,519,904
1992	61,596	24,914	[5]330,710	[5]1,528,419
1993	57,335	22,091	307,584	1,425,314
1994	58,408	21,612	314,148	[5]1,424,623
1995	57,464	20,149	302,177	[5]1,429,709

[1] Includes the indictable offence groups of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery and the summary offences of common assault.

[2] Includes the indictable offences of theft from a vehicle, theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle, aggravated vehicle taking and the summary offences of stealing and unauthorised taking of a conveyance and aggravated vehicle taking.

[3] Taken as all indictable offences.

[4] Taken as all indictable, summary non motoring and summary motoring offences.

[5] Includes allowance for known shortfalls in the data. It is not possible to produce estimates for the more detailed offence categories.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers on hunger strike at Her Majesty's prison, Rochester have been detained longer than two months. [15580]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* On 14 February 1997, the total number of detainees taking part in the protest at Rochester was six, of whom five have sought asylum at some stage. All have been detained for longer than two months.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many hunger strikers at Her Majesty's prison, Rochester have alleged torture in their applications for asylum; and how many of these have had access to independent medical assessment of their allegations. [15581]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* Such information is not readily available but any such allegations would have been considered very carefully by both the Home Office and, if an appeal had been heard, by independent adjudicators. The Prison Service affords detainees at Rochester and their legal advisers the facilities to obtain independent medical assessments and advice.

Prison Service Annual Report

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the annual report of the Prison Service agency for 1995–96. [15507]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the publication date of the Annual Report of the Prison Service Agency 1995–96.

The preparation of the Annual Report is now in its final stages. Arrangements for printing and distributing will be made soon and I expect it to be published shortly.

Prison Service Capacity

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes have taken place to the Prison Service agency's month by month forecast of planned *(a)* in-use certified normal accommodation and *(b)* operational capacity for 12 months ahead, as it existed in October 1996; and to what extent each such change has been due to (i) cancellations or delays of projects because of difficulties in obtaining planning consents and (ii) other reasons, indicating the reasons in each case. [15509]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Ivan Lawrence dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question concerning what changes have taken place to the Prison Service Agency's month by month forecast of planned (a) in-use certified normal accommodation (b) operational capacity for 12 months ahead, as it existed in October 1996; and to what extent each such change has been due to (i) cancellations or delays of projects because of difficulties in obtaining planning consents and (ii) other reasons, indicating the reasons in each case.

The Prison Service building and refurbishment programme at existing prisons is running to plan and not being held up by planning delays. We are also looking for sites for temporary prisons to provide about 800 places as a short term measure.

Our preferred option was to use RAF Finningley, near Doncaster. A notice of the proposed development was lodged with Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council but the council has objected to the proposal. I am therefore looking at other possible options.

The Prison Service took possession of a floating prison, which is currently berthed in New York, on 31 January 1997. An application for planning consent was considered by Weymouth and Portland Borough Council on 6 February. The council rejected the application which has now been referred to the Secretary of State for the Environment and it is hoped that a decision will be reached by mid-March.

A proposed development for a former leisure facility at Heysham, was submitted on 20 December 1996 under Environment Circular Instruction 18/84, for a change of use to a prison. The planning application has yet to be determined.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the outturn or planned *(a)* in-use certified normal accommodation and *(b)* operational capacity for the prison estate for each month from October 1996 to September 1997; and if he will list the establishments in which the main changes have occurred or are planned to occur over that period, with the number of places involved in each case. [15508]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question concerning the outturn and planned in-use certified normal accommodation (CNA) and operational capacity for the prison estate, indicating at which establishment main changes have or are expected to occur.

The monthly in-use CNA and operational capacity figures for the whole prison estate are listed in the attached table 1. The figures from October 1996 to January 1997 are recorded actuals with subsequent months being forecasted figures.

The reasons for the main changes to in-use CNA and operational capacity are detailed in the attached table 2.

Table 1: In use CNA and operation capacity for the prison estate

Date	*In-use CNA*	*Operational capacity*
October 1996	53,500	59,000
November 1996	54,000	59,600
December 1996	54,000	59,800
January 1997	54,200	60,000
February 1997	55,000	60,300
March 997	55,200	60,500
April 1997	56,000	61,200
May 1997	56,500	61,300
June 1997	57,100	61,900
July 1997	57,200	62,100
August 1997	57,600	62,400
September 1997	57,900	62,600

Table 2: Establishments where main changes have occurred

Establishment	*Planned date of change*	*In use change*	*Operational capacity change*	*Reason for change*
Chelmsford	October 1996 (actual)	198	None	New wings
Kirkham	December 1996 (actual)	80	80	New RTUs
Swansea	December 1996 (actual)	99	120	Return from refurbishment
Haverigg	December 1996 (actual)	80	80	New RTUs
Doncaster	December 1996 (actual)	None	100	Contingency Increase
Hull	January 1997 (actual)	113	113	New wing
Stocken	February 1997	40	40	New RTUs
Ashwell	February 1997	40	40	New RTUs
Littlehey	February 1997	40	40	New RTUs
Lewes	February 1997	174	162	Return from refurbishment
Nottingham	February 1997	177	177	New building

Table 2: Establishments where main changes have occurred

Establishment	*Planned date of change*	*In use change*	*Operational capacity change*	*Reason for change*
Kirklevington	March/April 1997	80	80	New RTUs
Temporary accommodation	April 1997	400	400	—
Glen Parva	April 1997	120	None	Return from refurbishment
Preston	May 1997	156	220	Return from refurbishment
Liverpool	May 1997	111	182	Return from refurbishment
Holme House	June 1997	120	120	New houseblocks
Garth	June 1997	120	120	New houseblocks
Temporary accommodation	July 1997	400	400	—
Wetherby	July/August 1997	120	120	New houseblocks
Elmley	July/August 1997	120	120	New houseblocks
Brixton	August 1997	150	150	Return from refurbishment
New Hall	August 1997	120	120	New houseblocks

Prison Service Funding

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the overall target reduction in operating costs for the Prison Service agency per baseline certified normal accommodation place over the four years 1995–96 to 1999–2000 implicit in the November 1996 announcements on funding for the Prison Service *(a)* excluding extra funds for implementing the Woodcock report and for mandatory drug testing and *(b)* including such funds. [15510]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question asking about target reductions in cost per place.

The figures are in real terms, i.e. adjusted for inflation and are also adjusted to ensure like for like comparison over a period of years, by stripping out the funds transferred to the Prison Service previously held elsewhere (e.g. payments to local authorities under Section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act) and also by stripping out both the cost and the places associated with design, construct, manage and finance (DCMF) contract prisons (because payments to contractors include a capital element, and they are therefore not comparable with the current cost per place of public sector prisons).

On this basis, the reduction in real terms of cost per place, comparing provision for 1999–2000 and outturn for 1995–96, is 5.5% excluding new money to complete implementation of the Woodcock proposals. Including this money the comparison becomes 5.9%.

The figures for the period 1996–97 to 1999–2000 are the ones which we will now be using in our future plans. Comparing provision for 1999–2000 with provision for 1996–97, the reduction is 4.9% or excluding new money for Woodcock, 5.3%.

Absconding Prisoners

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers of *(a)* absconds from open conditions and *(b)* temporary leave failures for the Prison Service for 1992–93, and for each subsequent year. [15512]

Miss Widdeombe *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Ivan Lawrence dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what were the numbers of (a) absconds from open conditions and (b) temporary leave failures for the Prison Service for 1992–93, and for each subsequent year.

The information requested is attached.

Absconds from open conditions[1]

	Number
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	1,432
1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994	1,403
1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995	1,192
1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996	947
1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997	886

[1] The above figures include absconds from establishments which have both an open and closed element.

Temporary release failures[1]

	Number
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	3,378
1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994	2,740
1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995	1,825
1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996	438
1 April 1996 to 31 January 1997	220

[1] The above are prisoners who failed to return and were reported to the police as unlawfully at large.

Prison Service (Early Retirement)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are now expected to leave the Prison Service as a result of the voluntary early retirement and severance scheme. [15513]

Miss Widdecome *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the Prison Service voluntary early retirement and severance scheme.

1090 members of staff have accepted offers of early retirement or severance. We are awaiting replies to offers that have been made to a further 57 staff.

Prisons (Staffing Levels)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the staff to inmate ratio for the Prison Service in 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990 and in each subsequent year. [15514]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Prison Service staff: prisoner ratios.

The ratios are as follows:

Year	*Staff*	*Prisoner*
1970	1	2.47
1975	1	2.02
1980	1	2.30
1985	1	2.02
1990'	1	1.40
1991	1	1.40
1992	1	1.31
1993	1	1.17
1994	1	1.24
1995	1	1.26
1996	1	1.33

' The fall reflects the change in prison officer working practices and the reduction in their hours worked.

Prison Officer Kettleborough (Injuries)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Prison Officer Kettleborough has applied to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board for compensation in respect of injuries during the Whitemoor escape. [15594]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* It is not the practice of either the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board or the new Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority to disclose details about individual applications.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the nature of the gunshot wound suffered by Prison Officer Kettleborough at the time of the Whitemoor escape; and for how long he remained in hospital. [15595]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 18 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the gun shot wound suffered by a prison officer during the escape from Whitemoor in September 1994.

The officer received a graze and severe bruising to his lower abdomen. He was treated at hospital, but not admitted.

Crime Clear-up Rates

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the crime clear-up rates for each police force in England in the most recent year for which figures are available. [16220]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The latest information relates to 1995 and is published in table 2.11 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1995" (Cm 3421), a copy of which is available in the Library.

Policing (London)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much an average band D council tax payer in London paid towards policing costs in 1996–97; and if he will estimate *(a)* the cost for 1997–98 and *(b)* the percentage change. [16218]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* For 1996–97, the receiver for the Metropolitan police district issued a precept of £49.84 per property in council tax band D for Metropolitan police purposes. The budget proposals for 1997–98, which the receiver has submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend for approval, would require a precept of £57.00 per property in council tax band D. This would be an increase of 14.4 per cent.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police constables there were in London in each division and area in each of the years from 1992 to 1997. [16219]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The information requested is given in the following two tables. Owing to restructuring in the Metropolitan police in 1994, when the number of areas was reduced from eight to five, valid comparisons of area police strength cannot be made between the two tables. Figures for January 1995 appear in both tables as some officers were still in the process of being transferred from the old to the new restructured areas.

The number of constables in the Metropolitan police will increase during 1997 as a result of the 3.4 per cent. funding increase for the Metropolitan police for 1997–98 over their 1996–97 allocation.

Metropolitan police constable strength

	7 January 1992 total	*4 January 1993 total*	*7 January 1994 total*	*3 January 1995 total*
1. Area HQ	388	398	403.6	3
Tottenham	232	229	228	—
Hornsey	219	206.6	213.6	—
Ponders End	222	218	232	—
Enfield	192	202	202.46	—
Holloway	211	200	212.6	—
Islington	256	224	235.5	—
Leyton	180	179.4	180.4	—
Ilford	202	192	201	—
Chingford	192	184.4	189.4	—
Barkingside	218	202	210.4	—
Total	2,512	2,435.4	2,508.96	3
2. Area HQ	368	362	310.4	289
Hackney	277	260	258	—
Stoke Newington	242	223	247	—
Bethnal Green	156	138	136	—
Leman Street	155	148	149	—
Limehouse	245	220	239	—

Metropolitan police constable strength

	7 January 1992 total	4 January 1993 total	7 January 1994 total	3 January 1995 total
Havering	293	283	293.01	—
Dagenham	222	231	232	—
Plaistow	233	226	242.8	—
West Ham	241	227	214.68	—
Total	2,432	2,318	2,321.89	289
3 .Area HQ	357	345.6	340.5	10
Southwark	248	224	239.53	—
Peckham	239	232.9	245.5	—
Walworth	212	189	199	—
Catford	211	223	204.6	—
Lewisham	266	249.6	264.8	—
Orpington	187	164.44	165.58	—
Bromley	225	205	203	—
Greenwich	223	208	197.8	—
Plumstead	224	223	211	—
Bexleyheath	227	216.5	214.6	—
Total	2,619	2,481.04	2,485.91	10
4. Area HQ	296	286	275	184
Brixton	231	232	240	—
Kennington	132	130	130.6	—
Clapham	175	177.5	155.9	—
Streatham	222	208	204.8	—
Wimbledon	249	229.4	251	—
Croydon	250	222	221	-
South Norwood	239	246.6	236.19	—
Epsom	319	292.5	303.5	—
Total	2,113	2,024	2,017.99	184
5. Area HQ	378	373.4	371.68	60
Wandsworth	173	157	165	—
Battersea	195	167	167.8	—
Tooting	177	179	192.5	—
Hounslow	215	202	214.2	—
Chiswick	152	141.4	158.7	—
Twickenham	251	218	244.95	—
Spelthorne	151	140.4	158.2	—
Kingston	319	294.4	312.7	—
Total	2,011	1,872.6	1,985.73	60
6. Area HQ	311	287.6	281.1	270
Heathrow	366	362.55	348.94	—
Ealing	274	260.58	281.23	—
Southall	200	215.7	219.78	—
Hayes	161	—	—	—
Uxbridge	193	—	—	—
Hillingdon	—	347.9	347.98	—
Chelsea	149	135	153	—
Kensington	179	163	168.1	—
Notting Hill	174	172	181	—
Hammersmith	273	266	261.33	—
Fulham	139	147	158	—
Total	2,419	2,357.33	2,400.46	270
7. Area HQ	368	362.4	350.1	310
West Hendon	188	184	193.6	—
Hampstead	206	196	174	—
Kentish Town	220	203	199	—
Holborn	161	156.7	150.7	—
Harrow	223	207.2	220.2	—
Wembley	204	181.91	197.7	—
Kilburn	313	298	286	—
Barnet	219	226	239.4	—
Golders Green	160	160.3	162.6	—
Total	2,262	2,175.51	2,173.3	310
8. Area HQ	355	383	376	355
West End Central	175	270	249	—
Vine Street	106	—	—	—
Charing Cross	275	313.4	347.3	—
Paddington	219	217	219	—
Marylebone	192	204	204.4	—
Harrow Road	173	172	174	—
Belgravia	258	254.8	261.5	—
Total	1,753	1,814.2	1,831.2	355
Total areas	18,121	17,478.08	17,725.44	1,481

Metropolitan police constable strength

	3 January 1995	8 January 1996	2 January 1997
1. Area Central HQ	15	543	449.6
Belgravia	252.55	249.15	248.26
Notting Hill	192	184	199.6
Brompton	290.83	302.4	313.2
West End Central	246	247	239
Charing Cross	318.9	317.1	324.7
Marylebone	200.1	265.9	260.7
Paddington Green	367.6	280.6	279
Fulham	167	170.73	179.73
Hammersmith	258.2	251.4	270.66
Total	2,308.18	2,811.28	2,764.45
2. Area NW HQ	42	504.98	522.18
Hampstead	170	172	165.15
Kentish Town	211.7	220.86	221
Holborn	170.2	166.1	157.8
Holloway	212.6	211.9	200.9
Islington	238.5	234.1	250.7
Harrow	218.2	233.8	225.4
Wembley	209.7	208.6	218.6
Kilburn	307.88	289.14	294.26
Barnet	250	235.3	220.26
Golders Green	163.1	169.9	172.15
West Hendon	198	196.6	183.9
Ealing	276.93	289.68	283.28
Southall	226.68	231.96	228.3
Hornsey	224.95	218.6	208.3
Tottenham	232	217	215.1
Total	3,352.44	3,800.52	3,767.28
3. Area NE HQ	323.8	685	651.5
Shoreditch and Hackney	268.68	260.6	257.8
Stoke Newington	283.5	269.94	271.24
Limehouse	230	220.4	216.4
Whitechapel	265.7	265.7	264.4
Barkingside	234.4	230.5	232.8
Chingford	193.8	188.3	189.5
Ilford	202.49	203	203.6
Leyton	195.4	185	193.92
Havering	297.57	287.09	287.05
Forest Gate	247.28	255.68	253.48
Dagenham	243.6	244.2	243.45
Plaistow	256.8	250	257.4
Edmonton	213.2	208.38	210.78
Enfield	222	222.7	232.7
Total	3,678.22	3,976.49	3,966.02
4. Area SE HQ	362	509	488.75
Southwark	228.12	246.08	245.88
Peckham	242.6	259.63	247.03
Walworth	219	227.4	212.5
Catford	205.7	240.8	239.7
Lewisham	271.8	279.8	264.6
Bromley and Orpington	396.43	395.44	374.44
Plumstead	249.5	276.95	261.35
Greenwich	213.7	235.96	249.1
Bexleyheath	228	238.5	228.3
Croydon	237.5	231.3	230.36

Metropolitan police constable strength

	3 January 1995	*8 January 1996*	*2 January 1997*
South Norwood	260.8	274.78	263.58
Epsom	345.3	348.78	324.63
Total	3460.45	3764.42	3630.22
5. Area SW HQ	344.4	573.2	569.56
Heathrow	346.39	335.19	313.99
Brixton	254.75	249.1	257.9
Streatham	215.9	221.01	221.61
Vauxhall	332.1	300.9	297.24
Chiswick	152.7	155.5	152.5
Hounslow	204.6	209.7	209.7
Spelthorne	148.2	152.2	151.6
Twickenham	228.65	251.65	234.85
Kingston	293.44	311.94	285.84
Battersea	228.8	227.8	243.9
Wandsworth	269.98	283.48	283.48
Hillingdon	351	352.5	335.2
Wimbledon	288.45	265.85	259.25
Total	3659.36	3890.02	3816.62
Total areas	16458.65	18242.73	17944.59

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Travel and Accommodation Expenses

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Lord President of the Council what were the total costs, in respect of hon. members' (i) travel and (ii) accommodation *(a)* between Parliament and home or constituency, *(b)* on approved visits to the European Parliament, *(c)* on Select Committee visits and *(d)* on visits associated with other parliamentary duties in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [16255]

Mr. Newton: This information as provided by the Fees Office is set out in the table below. There is no specific provision for accommodation costs when travelling between Parliament and home or constituency. Costs of visits to the European Parliament are recorded in total, and are not differentiated as between travel and subsistence. Information in respect of Select Committees, parliamentary delegations, and other Committee costs, is a matter for the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed (Mr. Beith) on behalf of the House of Commons Commission.

Year	*Cost of travel between Parliament, home, and constituency (a)*	*Cost of approved visits to European Parliament (b)*	*Visits associated with other parliamentary duties (d)*
1992–93	6,865,405	29,939	146,220
1993–94	7,422,321	50,503	166,732
1994–95	7,693,378	45,704	187,914
1995–96	7,544,154	54,428	207,574
1996–97[1]	5,796,850	38,147	195,828

[1] Part-year—April to December inclusive.

Written Questions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council, of the written parliamentary questions in the past 12 years for which the costs of answering have already been calculated, which were the 10 questions which cost most to answer; and which hon. Members asked those questions. [16250]

Mr. Newton: Records are not kept in a form which makes it practicable to provide the information requested.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many people are employed by his Department to provide advice on the application of equal opportunities; and at what cost in the last year for which figures are available. [14475]

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office has a staff of fewer than 40. None is exclusively devoted to personnel management duties, and no meaningful cost figure can be calculated for staff effort devoted to equal opportunities issues.

HEALTH

Private Beds

11. **Mr. Touhig:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of private beds currently available in national health trust hospitals. [14737]

Mr. Horam: This information has not been collected since 1991.

Projected Deficits (Cornwall)

12. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the projected deficits of the NHS in Cornwall in the coming financial year. [14738]

Mr. Malone: National health service bodies are currently developing their financial plans for 1997–98 and will submit these to the NHS executive in April.

Worcester District General Hospital

13. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of the private finance initiative scheme to build a new Worcester district general hospital. [14739]

Mr. Horam: Worcester Royal Infirmary NHS trust is currently negotiating with their preferred private sector partner prior to submitting the full business case for the proposed private finance initiative scheme.

New Hospitals

14. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new hospitals have opened in the last three years. [14740]

Mr. Horam: Twenty-five major hospital developments have been completed in the NHS during the last three years at a total cost of nearly £700 million.

New Hospitals and Hospital Extensions

15. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new hospitals or hospital extensions have been considered under the private finance initiative; for how many of these private finance has been forthcoming; and what is his estimate of the average delay caused for those hospitals considered under the private finance initiative but which subsequently go ahead on the basis of public funds alone. [14741]

Mr. Horam: Full business cases recommending the use of private finance have been submitted for the provision of 25 new hospitals or hospital extensions each with a capital value of more than £1 million. Fourteen of these private finance schemes have reached contract signature. None of these 25 new hospitals or hospital extensions has subsequently gone ahead on the basis of public funding alone.

Health Service Administrators

16. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in the number of administrators in the health service since the abolition of the regional health authorities. [14742]

Mr. Malone: This information will not be centrally available until later this year. The Government are determined to tackle unnecessary bureaucracy and to secure maximum improvements in health care. The simplification and streamlining of national health service management through the merger of district health authorities and family health services authorities, the abolition of regional health authorities, the reduction in the running costs of the Department of Health and the measures announced in October 1995 to reduce trust management costs and health authority running costs reflect the Government's determination to achieve this aim. In all these measures will release some £300 million for direct patient care.

Hospital and Community Services (Normanton)

17. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effects of the revised funding formulae for the Wakefield health authority on provision of hospital and community services in 1997–98 in the Normanton constituency. [14743]

Mr. Horam: Wakefield health authority, which includes the hon. Member's constituency, has a net increase in its allocation targets.

Cancelled Operations

18. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many complaints he has received in the last 12 months about operations being cancelled within 24 hours of appointment. [14745]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available centrally.

Social Respite for Carers

19. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to promote the provision of social respite for carers. [14746]

Mr. Burns: Informal carers make a key contribution to the aims of community care by enabling many people to be cared for in their own homes. Promoting effective support for carers is one of our major priorities.

Local authorities receive very substantial resources for community care provision. They are expected to provide an appropriate range of respite and other support services to meet local needs. They have a built-in incentive to do so: failure to support carers in this way would be likely to lead to greater demand for more costly long-term residential care placements.

Our commitment to promoting effective support for carers is underwritten by on-going monitoring and development work, in particular by the social services inspectorate. This has enabled us to provide authorities with informed, practical guidance on assessing and meeting the needs for local respite care services in the most effective way.

Health Service Managers

20. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many managers there were in the NHS *(a)* in 1989 and *(b)* at the latest available date. [14747]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) on 3 December 1996, *Official Report* column *787.* Information for 1996 will be centrally available later this year.

Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

21. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to meet the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee. [14748]

Mr. Horam: We have no plans to meet the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, but look forward to continuing to receive regular advice from it.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

22. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to modify the rules, regulations and guidelines concerning the use of electro-convulsive therapy in the treatment of persons suffering from mental illness. [14749]

Mr. Burns: There are no current proposals to make any changes to the rules or regulations concerning the use of electro-convulsive therapy. The question of guidelines on the use of ECT is a matter for professional clinicians who administer it. In 1995 the Royal College of Psychiatrists' special committee on ECT published a practical set of guidelines for psychiatrists who prescribe and administer ECT.

Public Appointments

23. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health for how many appointments to boards, trusts and other guangos he is responsible. [14751]

Mr. Malone: The Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1996" lists health bodies to which appointments are made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Copies are available in the Library. In

addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also makes 138 appointments to boards of hospital special trustees.

Cancelled Operations

24. **Mr. Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the South and West region in the past 12 months have had their operations cancelled *(a)* on the day they were due to go into hospital and *(b)* after admission. [14752]

Mr. Horam: Information is available in the Library on operations cancelled for non-medical reasons on the day a patient is due to be admitted, or after admission, and who are not given a new date within one month of the cancellation.

Heart Attack Deaths

25. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made towards reaching the "Health of the Nation" target relating to deaths from heart attack. [14753]

Mr. Horam: Progress towards the "Health of the Nation" targets to reduce deaths from coronary heart disease is encouraging. The latest data show that between 1989–90–91 and 1993–94–95, death rates fell by 19.2 per cent. for people aged under 65 and by 12.5 per cent. for people aged 65 to 74.

Health Service Internal Market

26. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cost of the internal market in the NHS. [14754]

Mr. Horam: The national health service internal market has greatly increased the responsiveness of the NHS, fostering innovation, responsiveness and efficiency. The introduction of the NHS internal market has consequently yielded a substantial net benefit both to patients and to taxpayers.

Prescribable Products

27. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received as a result of his consultation on products prescribable by general practitioners. [14755]

Mr. Malone: We have received about 200 representations in response to consultation on recommended changes to the list of products which general practitioners may not prescribe at national health service expense.

Dental Services

28. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the British Dental Association concerning *(a)* the effectiveness of its oversight of the profession and *(b)* its protection of patients from extensive and unnecessary treatment. [14756]

Mr. Malone: None. These are matters for the General Dental Council.

NHS Staff Salaries

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to NHS trusts about limits on staff salaries. [14736]

Mr. Dorrell: None.

NHS Supplies

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department takes to ensure that the contract price for a specific product or service quoted to an individual hospital trust is the same price as that tendered and successfully accepted for a national contract with NHS Supplies. [15699]

Mr. Horam: Individual national health service trusts make their own purchasing decisions and are responsible for ensuring that they achieve maximum value for money from their procurement. These decisions are not monitored centrally but are subject to audit scrutiny.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures NHS Supplies are required to follow before accepting a tender for contract; and on what grounds they may award a contract to an offer which is not the lowest tendered price. [15700]

Mr. Horam: The procedures followed by National Health Service Supplies staff are laid down in its standing orders and other supplementary guidance. It is also subject to all normal public procurement rules, as well as relevant European Community directives and World Trade Organisation agreements.

NHS supplies aim is to ensure that the NHS receives the best possible value for money from supplies contracts. NHS Supplies awards a contract to the lowest bidder unless this demonstrably offers inferior value for money when compared to other bids.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost savings generated by NHS Supplies. [15701]

Mr. Horam: Between October 1992 and April 1996 National Health Service Supplies achieved purchasing savings of some £264 million for the NHS.

Smoking and Conception Terminations

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his current estimate of the average numbers of people each week involved in *(a)* taking up smoking and *(b)* contributing to a conception that is terminated; and what were the equivalent figures in 1987. [15840]

Mr. Horam: No returns are made centrally which would provide the information required.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be the additional cost of the payment of 100 per cent. rather than 50 per cent. of the basic salary for junior doctors by the regional postgraduate dean. [15906]

Mr. Malone: There would be no additional cost. Junior doctors' basic salaries are paid in full from national health service funds.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the additional cost would be of paying junior doctors on part-time contracts or in flexible training posts the standard hourly rate for the first 40 hours of work in the week, rather than the first 20 hours. [15909]

Mr. Malone: Given the diverse range of working patterns junior doctors on part-time contracts undertake, it is not possible to identify the additional cost that would be incurred by paying the standard hourly rate for additional hours worked.

Arachnoiditis

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to commission research into arachnoiditis; and if he will make a statement. [15979]

Mr. Horam: There are no plans to commission research into arachnoiditis centrally.

Prescription Drugs

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost to the NHS of abolishing charges currently made for prescription drugs used to treat *(a)* epilepsy and *(b)* long-term depression. [15791]

Mr. Malone: People suffering from epilepsy who require continuous anti-convulsive therapy are exempt from prescription charges.

On the basis of a charge for a prescription item of £5.50 and the number of prescription items dispensed in 1995 for preparations in the British National Formulary, issue 28, September 1994, therapeutic group 4.3.1–4.3.3, some of which may have been prescribed for conditions other than long-term depression, it is estimated that about £8 million in charges would be lost annually in England to the national health service.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many asylum seekers have been given assistance under the National Assistance Act 1948 or Children Act 1989 by local authorities in each month since October 1996; and how much money has been allocated to local authorities for each month since October 1996 for this assistance. [15805]

Mr. Burns: Information on numbers being supported is not collected centrally.

The 1996–97 special grants for unaccompanied children and families with children will be allocated and paid to individual local authorities by the end of March. A special grant for adults being supported under the National Assistance Act was laid before Parliament on 11 February.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner fundholders there are in *(a)* the north-west and *(b)* England. [16192]

Mr. Malone: There are currently 1,857 general practitioner fundholders in the north-west region and 13,423 in England as a whole, with more preparing to join next year.

Dentures

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the entitlement of denturists and clinical dental technicians to practise legally in the United Kingdom in the direct supply of dentures to patients. [16021]

Mr. Malone: On 12 June last year, I announced in the House the Government's proposal to amend the Dentists Act 1984 following the General Dental Council's recommendation to set up new classes of dental auxiliaries and expand the range of work that they can do, including the legalisation of clinical dental technicians. As a first step it is intended to publish a consultation Bill on amendments to the Dentists Act.

Hospital Wards

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his forecast of when there will be more single-sex than mixed-sex wards; what cost is involved; and if he will make a statement. [15115]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of single-sex and mixed-sex wards is not collected centrally. As announced last month, we are taking forward a programme of work to ensure that patients charter standards on this issue are fully met. As a first step, we have asked health authorities to agree challenging local targets with trusts for achieving charter objectives on privacy and dignity and to report back to the national health service executive by the end of February.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of research funded by the Government into Alzheimer's disease and on his plans for extending it. [15863]

Mr. Burns: The Government's commitment to the health and well-being of all mentally ill people is set out by the inclusion of mental health as one of five key areas in our Health of the Nation strategy. The Medical Research Council, the Department's policy research programme and the national health service research and development programme are all undertaking work into dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. For example, the policy research programme is contributing almost £1 million to the Medical Research Council's cognitive and aging study. Results of Government-funded research are made freely and widely available.

Bradford Hospitals Trust (Accidents to Patients)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many falls of elderly patients in the care of Bradford Hospitals Trust have been recorded. [16046]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Bradford Hospitals national health service trust.

NHS Funding (Yorkshire)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the allocation that Yorkshire health authorities would have received from the national health service under the previous funding formula; and what is the current allocation. [16041]

Mr. Horam: The national weighted capitation formula is used to provide a calculation of each health authority's fair share of available resources, known as its weighted capitation target. Changes in the calculated target inform the allocations process, they do not direct it. Changes in targets do not lead to immediate and corresponding changes in actual allocations.

The table shows the effect of the new formula on targets for health authorities in Yorkshire in 1997–98.

Health authority	*Total formula changes 1997–98 £000s*
Bradford	+2,043
Calderdale and Kirklees	+1,234
East Riding	+620
Leeds	+1,597
North Yorkshire	–2,970
Wakefield	+351
Barnsley	+475
Doncaster	+171
Rotherham	+161
Sheffield	+1,605
Total	+5,287

Nurses

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses in England were aged *(a)* between 20 and 30, *(b)* between 31 and 40, *(c)* between 41 and 50, and *(d)* over 50 years in each year from 1987–88 to 1995–96. [12690]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The information is not available in the form requested. The ages of nurses employed by the national health service in England are shown in the table.

NHS Hospital community health services (HCHS) nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding agency and learners[1]) by age in England as at 30 September 1987 to 1995[2]

whole-time equivalents

	Under 30 years	*30 to 39 years*	*40 to 49 years*	*50 years and over*	*Age not known*	*Total*
1987						
All NMHV staff	106,280	80,840	84,180	57,270	4,770	333,340
Qualified	80,490	63,460	56,210	35,450	3,740	239,360
Unqualified	25,790	17,370	27,970	21,810	1,030	93,980
1988						
All NMHV staff	104,150	81,900	85,360	59,420	4,070	334,910
Qualified	79,460	65,070	57,600	36,670	3,130	241,920
Unqualified	24,690	16,830	27,760	22,760	950	92,980
1989						
All NMHV staff	100,080	84,100	86,060	61,850	4,400	336,500
Qualified	76,830	67,440	59,340	38,210	3,270	244,610
Unqualified	23,250	16,670	27,190	23,640	8,950	91,890
1990						
All NMHV staff	95,550	86,370	86,380	63,630	4,590	336,520
Qualified	71,550	69,130	59,340	39,030	3,280	242,340
Unqualified	21,580	16,500	28,700	24,430	1,190	90,400
Other	2,420	740	340	160	120	3,780
1991						
All NMHV staff	95,440	89,370	86,520	62,470	11,070	344,860
Qualified	69,380	70,960	59,530	37,860	5,530	243,250
Unqualified	20,640	16,840	26,200	24,330	2,530	90,550
Other	5,420	1,570	780	280	3,010	11,050
1992						
All NMHV staff	88,410	93,830	87,900	63,600	10,310	344,050
Qualified	66,170	75,360	61,260	38,300	5,490	246,570
Unqualified	19,600	17,400	25,970	24,960	2,920	90,850
Other	2,640	1,070	670	340	1,910	6,630
1993						
All NMHV staff	80,120	95,830	86,440	62,610	15,420	340,420
Qualified	59,320	76,680	60,170	36,840	8,840	241,850
Unqualified	18,790	17,760	25,150	25,160	5,090	91,950
Other	2,000	1,400	1,120	610	1,490	6,620
1994						
All NMHV staff	76,720	100,170	85,650	61,970	13,090	337,600
Qualified	55,870	79,610	59,610	35,840	7,860	238,780

NHS Hospital community health services (HCHS) nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding agency and learners[1]) by age in England as at 30 September 1987 to 1995[2]

whole-time equivalents

	Under 30 years	*30 to 39 years*	*40 to 49 years*	*50 years and over*	*Age not known*	*Total*
Unqualified	18,790	18,740	24,680	25,340	5,010	92,550
Other	2,060	1,820	1,370	800	220	6,270
1995[2]						
All NMHV staff	*70,430*	*102,050*	*82,940*	*58,890*	*16,130*	*330,440*
Qualified	*54,380*	*84,170*	*61,730*	*36,860*	*9,690*	*246,820*
Unqualified	*15,870*	*17,660*	*21,020*	*21,930*	*6,440*	*82,910*
Other	*180*	*220*	*190*	*100*	*10*	*710*
Learners' not included in the above						
	1987	*64,570*	*1990*	*58,840*	*1993*	*21,040*
	1988	*62,940*	*1991*	*47,340*	*1994*	*11,080*
	1989	*62,100*	*1992*	*34,740*	*[2]1995*	*7,180*

Notes:

[1] Learners are nurses on traditional nurse training courses and are directly employed by the NHS HCHS. Project 2000 training was introduced in 1989 and has gradually replaced traditional pre-registration nurse training. Project 2000 students are funded by bursaries, they are supernumary not employees and thus excluded from the count of NHS HCHS nursing staff. There were about 33,000 Project 2000 students in September 1995.

[2] Figures for 1995 are based on a new classification for non-medical staff known as "new occupation codes". These codes replaced the old "payscale" based classification used in earlier years. Figures for 1995 are, therefore, not directly comparable with earlier years.

Figures exclude General Medical Service practice nurses—numbering 9,970 in 1995.

Source:

Department of Health's annual non-medical workforce census.

Anaesthetics (Organophosphate Exposure)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the possible dangers arising out of the use of Suxamethonium and similar anaesthetics on patients who have been exposed to orgnaophosphates, with particular reference to (i) agricultural workers, (ii) pet owners and (iii) Gulf war veterans; and if he will make a statement. [14152]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 5 February 1997]:* The Department of Health has not commissioned research into the use of Suxamethonium use in agricultural workers, pet owners or Gulf war veterans exposed to organophosphate pesticides.

The available research into the side-effects of Suxamethonium and related anaesthetics, as for all marketed medicines, was assessed at the time of granting the marketing authorisation and continues to be evaluated by the Medicines Control Agency whenever new information emerges.

Suxamethonium and related anaesthetics are contra-indicated for use in patients known to have low serum levels of pseudocholinesterase—the enzyme which breaks down this type of medicine. Most often low levels of pseudocholinesterase are due to an inherited structural abnormality of the enzyme but another cause of low pseudocholinesterase activity is acute organophosphorus insecticide poisoning. There is a specific warning in the product information, produced by the manufacturer and authorised by the licensing authority, which contra-indicates use in those patients who have poisoning with an organophosphorus insecticide.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 19 February 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Births

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what decision has been made about whether, in the event of Roisin McAliskey giving birth while in custody, she will be handcuffed to a birthing partner or prison officer while the child is being delivered; [15636]

(2) if the change in policy whereby a prisoner is not handcuffed or otherwise restrained during labour and birth of her child applies to category A prisoners. [15637]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answers 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 19 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the use of restraints during childbirth.

The Home Secretary in his statement of 18 January 1996 made it clear that no woman admitted to hospital to give birth would be restrained while in hospital.

This includes Roisin McAliskey and any other category A prisoners.

Criminal Record Checks

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in England and Wales, how many criminal record checks were carried out on behalf of *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* health bodies, *(c)* independent schools, *(d)* grant-maintained schools, *(e)* further education establishments, *(f)* voluntary organisations and *(g)* nursery groups by each police force in England and Wales under the child protection arrangements, pursuant to Home Office circular 47/93 for each year ended 31 March from 1993 to 1996; and in each case how many checks revealed a criminal conviction. [16584]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not available centrally in the form requested. The total number of criminal record checks carried out on behalf of local authorities, statutory health bodies, independent schools, grant-maintained schools and further education establishments under the child protection arrangements outlined in Home Office circular 47/93 for the years ended 31 March 1993 to 31 March 1996, and the number of those checks which revealed a criminal conviction, was as follows:

Year	*Total number of checks*	*Number revealing convictions*[1]
1993	654,472	33,894
1994	609,434	38,162
1995	607,573	39,679
1996	613,163	38,809

[1] Not all forces were able to provide details of the number of checks which revealed convictions.

No figures are available on the number of criminal record checks carried out for voluntary organisations or on people working in nursery groups.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the frequency of checks on individuals under the child protection arrangements, pursuant to Home Office circular 47/93. [16585]

Mr. Maclean: Home Office circular 47/93 advises that in the case of agency staff employed by a local authority or health authority a check should be regarded as valid for three years. There is no recommendation that other staff should be rechecked at regular intervals.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of enhanced criminal record checks which will be undertaken in the year to 31 March 1999 under the arrangements to be established under the Police Bill *[Lords]*. [16587]

Mr. Maclean: It was originally estimated that, when the Criminal Records Agency became fully operational, it would issue around 1.3 million enhanced criminal record certificates each year. The Police Bill *[Lords]*, as amended, provides for free checks for volunteers which we expect would increase demand for these certificates.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if payments are made by local education authorities and social services authorities to police forces for criminal record checks. [16590]

Mr. Maclean: No.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the unit costs to (i) police authorities and (ii) local authorities of each criminal record check made in respect of child protection, pursuant to Home Office circular 47/93. [16591]

Mr. Maclean: There are wide variations in the cost of criminal record checks across police forces. It is estimated that, on average, it costs a police force £6.35 to carry out a criminal record check. It is not possible to break the figures down in order to identify the costs of child protection checks, although these will be higher than the average. Information is not available on the costs incurred by local authorities.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place for checking employees and volunteers working with people under 19 years who are not eligible for checks under arrangements made pursuant to Home Office circulars 47/93 and 92/117; what categories of individual are not covered by the arrangements under these two circulars; and what is the estimated number of individuals in these categories. [16593]

Mr. Maclean: There are no formal arrangements for checking employees and volunteers working with people under 19 years of age who are not eligible for checks under the arrangements set out in Home Office circulars 47/93 and 42/94. Home Office circular 42/94 replaced 117/92 which has been cancelled. However, in 1993, the Home Office published a code of practice entitled "Safe from Harm" which offers voluntary organisations that work with children, but are not covered by the terms of the Home Office circulars, guidance on good policy and practice in areas such as recruitment, supervision and management of staff. Copies of "Safe from Harm" are in the Library.

The main categories of individual not covered by the arrangements set out in the two circulars are employees and volunteers working for voluntary or private child-care organisations.

It is not known exactly how many individuals are excluded from checking under the current arrangements but it is estimated that about 700,000 extra people would be eligible to apply for the enhanced criminal record certificates proposed in the Police Bill *[Lords]*.

Road Running

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what liaison he has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Secretary of State for National Heritage since 5 December 1996 in respect of ensuring the continued success of road running; and if he will make a statement. [16234]

Mr. Maclean: None. The police's approach towards road running races and other events held on the public highway is an operational matter and one for chief officers of police and the Association of Chief Police Officers. I understand that, because of concerns about the safety of all road users, including race participants, and the inconvenience that can be caused to other road users, the association encourages organisations to undertake such events away from the highway.

Police (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police there were in Lancashire in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1979; [16150]

(2) how much was spent by his Department on the police in Lancashire in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1979. [16149]

Mr. Maclean: The information available is set out in the table:

Lancashire Constabulary	[1]*1979–80*	[2]*1996–97*
Police Numbers	3,089	3,203
Expenditure (£ million)[3]	37.289	163.563

[1] Police numbers as at 31 December 1979.
[2] Police numbers as at 30 September 1996.
[3] Expenditure includes police grant, revenue support grant and locally raised taxes.

Police (London)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of police officers in London per 10,000 population, by borough using 1991 census data, as at 1 January in each of the last five years. [15968]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the two following tables. Officers based at headquarters and at Heathrow have not been included.

Table 1: Outer London

Outer London	*1992*			*1993*			*1994*		
Borough and division	*Strength*	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*	*Strength*	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*	*Strength*	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*
Barking and Dagenham									
Barking and Dagenham	279	143,681	19.42	286	143,681	19.91	287	143,681	19.97
Barnet									
Barnet[1]	753	293,564	25.65	759.3	293,564	25.86	780.6	293,564	26.59
Golders Green									
West Hendon									
Bexley									
Bexleyheath	285	215,615	13.22	277.5	215,615	12.287	273	215,615	12.66
Brent									
Wembley	660	243,025	27.16	623.91	243,025	25.67	620.1	243,025	25.52
Kilburn									
Bromley									
Bromley	523	290,609	18.00	473.44	290,609	16.29	480.58	290,609	16.54
Orpington									
Croydon									
Croydon	626	313,510	19.97	597.6	313,510	19.06	579.69	313,510	18.49
South Norwood									
Ealing									
Ealing	604	275,257	21.94	620.28	275,257	22.53	653.01	275,257	23.72
Southall									
Enfield									
Edmonton	527	257,417	20.47	532	257,417	20.67	549.46	257,417	21.35
Enfield[1]									

Table 1: Outer London

Outer London	1992			1993			1994		
Borough and division	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Greenwich									
Greenwich	569	207,650	27.40	545	207,650	26.25	517.8	207,650	24.94
Plumstead									

Outer London	1995			1996			1997		
Borough and division	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Barking and Dagenham									
Barking and Dagenham	304.6	143,681	21.20	303.2	143,681	21.10	299.85	143,681	20.87
Barnet									
Barnet[1]	790.85	293,564	26.94	752.55	293,564	25.63	736.06	293,564	25.07
Golders Green									
West Hendon									
Bexley									
Bexleyheath	285	215,615	13.22	295.5	215,615	13.70	287.3	215,615	13.32
Brent									
Wembley	651.98	243,025	26.83	617.74	243,025	25.42	639.86	243,025	26.33
Kilburn									
Bromley									
Bromley	500.43	290,609	17.22	490.44	290,609	16.88	471.44	290,609	16.22
Orpington									
Croydon									
Croydon	623.8	313,510	19.90	633.88	313,510	20.22	625.34	313,510	19.95
South Norwood									
Ealing									
Ealing	643.86	275,257	23.39	660.64	275,257	24.00	645.47	275,257	23.45
Southall									
Enfield									
Edmonton	543.6	257,417	21.12	545.48	257,417	21.19	553.88	257,417	21.52
Enfield[1]									
Greenwich									
Greenwich	573.2	207,650	27.60	623.31	207,650	30.02	622.85	207,650	30.00
Plumstead									

Outer London	1992			1993			1994		
Borough and division	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Harrow									
Harrow	288	200,100	14.39	272.2	200,100	13.60	277.2	200,100	13.85
Havering									
Romford	369	229,492	16.08	366	229,492	15.95	375.01	229,492	16.34
Hillingdon									
Hillingdon	467	231,602	20.16	453.9	231,602	19.60	443.98	231,602	19.17
Hounslow									
Chiswick	474	204,397	23.19	451.4	204,397	22.08	482.9	204,397	23.63
Hounslow									
Kingston									
Kingston[1]	403	132,996	30.30	375.4	132,996	28.23	395.7	132,996	29.75
Merton									
Wimbledon	313	168,470	18.58	291.4	168,470	17.30	312	168,470	18.52

Outer London	1992			1993			1994		
Borough and division	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Redbridge									
Ilford	555	226,218	24.53	520	226,218	22.99	536.4	226,218	23.71
Barkingside[1]									
Richmond									
Richmond	333	160,732	20.72	298	160,732	18.54	321.35	160,732	19.99
Sutton									
Sutton[1]	402	168,880	23.80	373.9	168,880	22.14	390	168,880	23.09
Spelthorne									
Spelthorne	203	89,987	22.56	189.4	89,987	21.05	208.2	89,987	23.14
Waltham Forest									
Chingford	472	212,033	22.26	461.8	212,033	21.78	473.8	212,033	22.35
Leyton									

Outer London	1995			1996			1997		
Borough and division	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Harrow									
Harrow	272.2	200,100	13.60	293.8	200,100	14.68	283.4	200,100	14.6
Havering									
Romford	377.17	229,492	16.43	363.49	229,492	15.84	351.05	229,492	15.30
Hillingdon									
Hillingdon	439.5	231,602	18.98	437	231,602	18.87	418.7	231,602	18.08
Hounslow									
Chiswick	466.3	204,397	22.81	484.2	204,397	23.69	470	204,397	22.99
Hounslow									
Kingston									
Kingston[1]	373.14	132,996	28.06	393.34	132,996	29.58	362.24	132,996	27.24
Merton									
Wimbledon	354.45	168,470	21.04	334.85	168,470	19.88	325.25	168,470	19.31
Redbridge									
Ilford	553.89	226,218	24.48	545.1	226,218	24.10	552	226,218	24.40
Barkingside[1]									
Richmond									
Richmond	297.45	160,732	18.51	319.85	160,732	19.90	295.85	160,732	18.41
Sutton									
Sutton[1]	428.9	168,880	25.40	431.38	168,880	25.54	405.23	168,880	24.00
Spelthorne									
Spelthorne	199.2	89,987	22.14	199.8	89,987	22.20	198.2	89,987	22.03
Waltham Forest									
Chingford	487.2	212,033	22.98	463.3	212,033	21.85	477.22	212,033	22.51
Leyton									

Note:
[1] Officer strength shown for these divisions includes provision for policing parts of the borough situated in the counties of Hertfordshire, Surrey or Essex.

Table 2: Inner London

Inner London	1992			1993			1994		
	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Camden									
Hampstead	749	170,444	43.94	721.7	170,444	42.34	691.7	170,444	40.58
Kentish Town									
Holborn									

Table 2: Inner London

Inner London	*1992*		*1993*			*1994*		
	Strength	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*	*Strength*	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*	*Strength*	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*
Hackney									
Shoreditch	651	181,248	35.92	611	181,248	33.71	633	181,248	34.92
Stoke Newington									
Hammersmith and Fulham									
Hammersmith	536	148,502	36.09	541	148,502	36.43	548.33	148,502	36.92
Fulham									
Haringey									
Hornsey	577	202,204	28.54	561.6	202,204	27.77	561.6	202,204	27.77
Tottenham									
Islington									
Holloway	599	164,686	36.37	547	164,686	33.21	568.1	164,686	34.50
Islington									
Kensington and Chelsea									
Brompton	670	138,394	48.41	632	138,394	45.67	655.1	138,394	47.34
Notting Hill									
Lambeth									
Brixton	988	244,834	40.35	980.5	244,834	40.05	947.4	244,834	38.70
Streatham									
Vauxhall									
Lewisham									
Catford	598	230,983	25.89	593.6	230,983	25.70	588.4	230,983	25.47
Lewisham									
Newham									
Forest Gate	595	212,170	28.04	570	212,170	26.87	577.48	212,170	27.22
Plaistow									

Inner London	*1995*		*1996*			*1997*		
Borough and division	*Strength*	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*	*Strength*	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*	*Strength*	*Census population*	*Number of officers per 10,000 population*
Camden									
Hampstead	703.9	170,444	41.30	698.76	170,444	41.00	681.95	170,444	40.41
Kentish Town									
Holborn									
Hackney									
Shoreditch	693.18	181,248	38.24	659.54	181,248	36.39	676.04	181,248	37.30
Stoke Newington									
Hammersmith and Fulham									
Hammersmith	545.2	148,502	36.71	533.13	148,502	35.90	561.25	148,502	37.79
Fulham									
Haringey									
Hornsey	579.95	202,204	28.68	544.6	202,204	26.93	535	202,204	26.46
Tottenham									
Islington									
Holloway	567.9	164,686	34.48	562	164,686	34.13	569.6	164,686	34.59
Islington									
Kensington and Chelsea									
Brompton	616.83	138,394	44.57	604.4	138,394	43.67	642.4	138,394	46.42
Notting Hill									
Lambeth									
Brixton	1,003.05	244,834	40.97	969.81	244,834	39.61	967.3	244,834	39.51
Streatham									
Vauxhall									
Lewisham									
Catford	598.3	230,983	25.90	642.6	230,983	27.82	626.3	230,983	27.11
Lewisham									
Newham									
Forest Gate	623.08	212,170	29.37	626.68	212,170	29.54	625.88	212,170	29.50
Plaistow									

Inner London	1992			1993			1994		
Borough and division	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census population	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Southwark									
Southwark	886	218,541	40.54	816.65	218,541	37.37	849.78	218,541	38.88
Peckham									
Walworth									
Tower Hamlets									
Whitechapel	722	161,064	44.83	669	161,064	41.54	690	161,064	42.84
Limehouse									
Wandsworth									
Battersea	719	252,425	28.48	671.6	252,425	26.61	693.3	252,425	27.47
Wandsworth									
Westminster									
Belgravia	1881	174,814	107.60	1905.85	174,814	109.02	1901.2	174,814	108.76
West End Central									
Charing Cross									
Marylebone									
Paddington									
Total	19,276.00	6,765,544	28.49	18,589.93	6,765,544	27.48	18,863.17	6,765,544	27.88

Inner London	1995			1996			1997		
Borough and division	Strength	Census Population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census Population	Number of officers per 10,000 population	Strength	Census Population	Number of officers per 10,000 population
Southwark									
Southwark	871.47	218,541	39.88	902.86	218,541	41.31	878.16	218,541	40.18
Peckham									
Walworth									
Tower Hamlets									
Whitechapel	633.7	161,064	39.34	613.7	161,064	38.10	596.4	161,064	37.03
Limehouse									
Wandsworth									
Battersea	647.78	252,425	25.66	638.18	252,425	25.28	662.28	252,425	26.24
Wandsworth									
Westminster									
Belgravia	1799.55	174,814	102.94	1714.55	174,814	98.08	1700.66	174,814	97.28
West End Central									
Charring Cross									
Marylebone									
Paddington									
Total	19,050.61	6,765,544	28.16	18,899.66	6,765,544	27.94	18744.31	6,765,544	27.71

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of police officers as at 1 January in each of the last five years in each police division in London, sub-totalled *(a)* on an area and *(b)* on a borough basis and in total. [15967]

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in two tables, which reflect the restructuring of the Metropolitan Police in 1994 when the number of areas was reduced from eight to five. Officers based at headquarters and at Heathrow have not been included. Copies of these tables have been placed in the Library.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each of the last three years and for 1979 the total number of police officers in each Metropolitan police area; and if he will make a statement. [15227]

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the table:

	Numbers of Police Officers			
Forces	May 1979	September 1994	September 1995	September 1996
Greater Manchester	6,440	6,949	7,026	6,961
Merseyside	4,441	4,690	4,536	4,271
Northumbria	3,285	3,592	3,611	3,693
South Yorkshire	2,560	3,029	3,041	3,128
West Midlands	6,031	6,981	7,078	7,203
West Yorkshire	4,739	5,039	5,122	5,154

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the total cost of public funds of the Metropolitan police in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [16950]

Mr. Howard: As police authority for the Metropolitan police district. I have approved estimates which provide for net revenue expenditure of £1,741.437 million in 1997–98.

The receiver for the Metropolitan police district is issuing, with my approval, a precept of £57.00 per property in band D of the council tax valuation band for Metropolitan police purposes.

I have discussed the estimates for the Metropolitan police expenditure in 1997–98 with representatives of the London local authority associations.

Devon and Cornwall Constabulary

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current authorised establishment of the Devon and Cornwall constabulary; and what was it in 1992. [16539]

Mr. Maclean: It is now for individual chief constables and police authorities to determine the number of officers in a force, having regard to the resources available to them. The Devon and Cornwall constabulary had 2,876 police officers in September 1996 compared to 2,898 in March 1992. The chief constable has estimated that the force will have 2,919 officers by the end of March 1997. Since 1992, the number of constables has increased from 2,197 to 2,248.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Written Questions

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many written questions were tabled by each hon. Member in the *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 parliamentary Sessions. [15395]

Mr. Newton: I have written to the hon. Member with the information requested and arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

Strangers' Cafeteria

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what is his latest estimate of the cost of refurbishing the Strangers' Cafeteria, including the cost of relocating other facilities in order to make space for the new facilities. [16614]

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The current forecast of the final cost of modernising the former Members' and Strangers' Cafeterias, including the cost of relocating displaced facilities and building a new kitchen to service both the Terrace Cafeteria and the Members' Tea Room—in line with recommendations made by the Committee in its First Report of Session 1993–94, which was approved by the House on 12 July 1994—is £6.6 million. This figure is significantly less than the estimate agreed by the Committee in October 1994.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cost to the teachers' superannuation scheme of early retirement on grounds of ill health over the last five years *(a)* in each local education authority and *(b)* per teacher in each local education authority. [16100]

Mrs. Gillan: The following table shows the total cost and cost per teacher from 1990–91 to 1995–96. The costs in each financial year are made up of the lump sum and annual pension paid in respect of new awards of ill health retirement only. The figures cover all members of the teachers' superannuation scheme.

Total and average cost of ill-health retirements 1990–91 to 1995–96

Last known local education authority	1990–91		1991–92		1992–93		1993–94		1994–95		1995–96	
	Total cost	Average cost per retirement	Total cost	Average cost per retirement	Total cost	Average cost per retirement	Total cost	Average cost per retirement	Total cost	Average cost per retirement	Total cost	Average cost per retirement
City	—	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	[1]—	—	[1]—
Camden	—	[1]—	269	26.9	307	27.9	393	28.0	879	35.1	817	34.0
Greenwich	—	[1]—	213	17.8	514	30.2	509	30.0	711	33.8	748	34.0
Hackney	—	[1]—	207	23.0	234	33.5	267	33.0	473	29.5	550	37.0
Hammersmith	—	[1]—	222	27.7	456	38.0	420	32.0	856	30.6	965	36.0
Islington	—	[1]—	268	29.7	404	28.9	349	32.0	532	31.3	771	39.0
Kensington and Chelsea	—	[1]—	139	27.8	132	26.5	185	37.0	146	29.1	555	37.0
Lambeth	—	[1]—	436	31.1	272	27.2	679	31.0	473	33.8	737	34.0
Lewisham	—	[1]—	492	24.6	554	36.9	461	29.0	529	33.1	573	34.0
Southwark	—	[1]—	319	24.5	418	29.9	815	33.0	428	32.9	871	35.0
Tower Hamlets	—	[1]—	151	18.8	337	28.1	507	30.0	510	31.8	342	24.0
Wandsworth	—	[1]—	382	29.4	505	31.5	588	31.0	771	32.1	649	30.0
Westminster	—	[1]—	246	22.4	597	33.2	280	28.0	743	37.2	776	43.0
Other ILEA and not known'	4,504	22.6	471	19.6	304	17.9	359	17.1	424	20.2	587	20.2
Barking	219	27.4	292	32.5	185	20.6	555	29.0	492	28.9	467	36.0
Barnet	182	18.2	367	24.4	677	30.8	541	36.0	983	33.9	820	32.0
Bexley	504	22.9	252	22.9	546	28.7	633	35.0	543	31.9	566	31.0
Brent	232	23.2	273	24.8	269	26.9	326	30.0	463	30.9	440	29.0
Bromley	540	22.5	411	27.4	460	32.8	588	28.0	526	30.9	1,017	35.0
Croydon	666	25.6	626	28.5	526	23.9	828	30.0	864	30.9	1,070	37.0
Ealing	499	21.7	455	24.0	338	21.1	349	27.0	428	28.5	554	31.0
Enfield	387	20.4	337	24.0	329	29.9	394	36.0	585	32.5	630	32.0
Haringey	100	16.7	219	31.3	107	17.9	264	33.0	530	29.4	680	36.0
Harrow	351	22.0	338	26.0	360	30.0	529	29.0	792	29.3	616	36.0
Havering	513	27.0	547	27.4	600	30.0	837	35.0	662	33.1	1,037	37.0
Hillingdon	500	25.0	725	27.9	439	27.4	181	26.0	311	28.3	539	36.0
Hounslow	581	22.3	354	27.2	392	26.1	408	27.0	760	31.7	1,148	35.0
Kingston upon Thames	141	28.2	[1]—	[1]—	309	33.2	312	26.0	381	34.6	683	33.0
Merton	345	24.6	134	26.7	245	40.9	361	30.0	276	27.6	263	33.0
Newham	279	23.3	267	20.6	386	27.6	587	33.0	566	25.7	376	29.0
Redbridge	414	24.4	433	27.0	219	31.3	300	33.0	390	27.8	236	30.0
Richmond upon Thames	[1]—	[1]—	214	23.7	177	35.4	463	29.0	413	27.5	421	30.0
Sutton	279	21.4	236	29.5	166	33.2	205	29.0	365	30.4	494	33.0
Waltham Forest	367	28.2	370	24.7	437	33.6	707	29.0	510	26.9	1,060	32.0
Birmingham	2,018	23.7	2,613	25.4	3,237	28.2	3,862	30.0	3,832	31.4	4,747	32.0
Coventry	667	23.8	1,047	24.4	820	26.5	1,165	27.0	1,198	29.2	1,058	32.0
Dudley	351	21.9	361	22.5	719	30.0	589	29.0	722	27.8	1,311	35.0

Total and average cost of ill health retirements 1990–91 to 1995–96

Last known local education authority	1990–91 Total cost	1990–91 Average cost per retirement	1991–92 Total cost	1991–92 Average cost per retirement	1992–93 Total cost	1992–93 Average cost per retirement	1993–94 Total cost	1993–94 Average cost per retirement	1994–95 Total cost	1994–95 Average cost per retirement	1995–96 Total cost	1995–96 Average cost per retirement
Sandwell	910	24.3	619	23.8	784	26.3	1,220	30.0	1,462	31.8	977	31.0
Solihull	637	25.5	413	23.0	655	32.7	529	31.0	962	34.4	554	31.0
Walsall	622	21.4	498	23.7	793	25.6	705	27.0	1,086	31.0	1,360	33.0
Wolverhampton	517	19.1	757	31.5	1,586	29.4	1,148	30.0	1,400	32.5	937	29.0
Knowsley	242	26.9	366	25.7	509	30.0	719	31.0	894	29.0	694	29.0
Liverpool	1,162	24.2	1,599	25.8	1,584	29.3	2,356	31.0	1,819	30.8	2,233	31.0
St. Helens	640	26.7	475	25.0	1,056	30.2	1,135	31.0	1,043	30.7	719	31.0
Sefton	752	24.3	745	24.8	1,217	30.4	1,653	34.0	1,385	33.8	1,397	33.0
Wirral	665	20.8	955	26.5	566	28.3	975	31.0	1,083	31.9	1,339	32.0
Bolton	695	21.1	794	27.4	1,029	31.2	1,202	30.0	1,167	30.7	944	33.0
Bury	302	20.1	245	20.4	421	26.3	472	25.0	769	29.6	749	31.0
Manchester	1,083	22.1	1,386	27.7	1,772	27.3	1,997	30.0	1,786	29.3	1,886	32.0
Oldham	528	21.9	360	21.2	564	28.2	1,005	31.0	810	31.2	931	32.0
Rochdale	522	23.7	744	28.6	634	30.2	1,076	30.0	1,269	32.5	1,378	32.0
Salford	456	22.8	499	20.8	553	26.3	1,091	33.0	728	28.0	767	27.0
Stockport	689	21.5	915	23.5	1,217	29.7	1,659	33.0	1,455	29.1	1,458	30.0
Tameside	491	25.8	473	24.9	809	29.0	689	30.0	1,102	32.4	937	30.0
Trafford	370	21.8	590	28.1	830	29.7	1,243	33.0	927	28.1	1,088	35.0
Wigan	272	18.1	541	25.7	592	26.9	1,315	28.0	949	31.6	1,317	34.0
Barnsley	746	24.1	562	26.8	666	31.7	796	31.0	1,241	35.5	887	33.0
Doncaster	838	22.1	908	26.7	649	26.0	877	28.0	999	32.2	975	31.0
Rotherham	361	20.1	497	22.6	600	27.3	839	31.0	859	30.7	899	37.0
Sheffield	1,014	21.1	890	23.4	1,144	27.9	1,779	31.0	1,529	31.9	1,705	30.0
Bradford	1,237	22.5	1,374	24.1	1,181	26.2	1,815	28.0	1,495	26.2	1,796	31.0
Calderdale	655	25.2	647	28.1	580	27.6	815	33.0	1,050	33.9	838	31.0
Kirklees	1,117	23.3	839	24.7	1,273	26.0	2,341	33.0	1,822	29.4	1,650	31.0
Leeds	1,491	22.9	1,354	24.2	1,612	29.3	2,701	30.0	2,807	31.5	3,017	31.0
Wakefield	733	24.4	1,313	26.3	1,414	28.9	1,607	32.0	1,393	29.6	1,750	30.0
Gateshead	385	25.6	338	26.0	573	28.1	519	26.0	639	29.0	1,164	31.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	409	22.7	1,111	23.6	708	24.4	1,037	31.0	1,154	35.0	1,190	33.0
North Tyneside	252	18.0	446	26.3	565	29.8	613	31.0	529	27.9	504	30.0
South Tyneside	481	22.9	464	24.4	684	31.1	734	32.0	604	30.2	741	30.0
Sunderland	1,329	22.9	1,055	25.1	1,551	31.0	1,676	35.0	1,712	32.3	1,469	33.0
Isles of Scilly	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Avon	1,760	23.2	2,040	25.8	1,759	26.6	3,010	29.0	3,784	32.6	3,386	33.0
Bedfordshire	1,490	23.3	1,138	24.7	1,402	28.0	1,705	30.0	2,123	30.8	1,584	29.0
Berkshire	1,260	22.9	1,893	25.6	1,981	31.0	2,299	31.0	2,273	32.5	2,452	33.0
Buckinghamshire	1,454	23.5	1,131	26.3	1,149	26.7	1,577	30.0	2,141	31.0	1,686	28.0
Cambridgeshire	941	20.9	1,240	27.6	1,248	27.7	1,191	31.0	2,098	30.9	1,680	29.0
Cheshire	2,279	25.3	2,039	24.9	2,230	29.0	3,067	31.0	3,607	31.9	3,625	33.0
Cleveland	1,953	24.4	1,923	25.3	2,661	29.6	3,155	32.0	3,113	31.4	3,236	30.0
Cornwall	1,632	23.0	1,400	27.5	1,287	27.4	1,384	31.0	1,447	32.2	2,347	33.0
Cumbria	700	21.2	1,285	25.2	1,224	27.8	1,562	28.0	1,519	30.4	1,676	33.0
Derbyshire	2,592	24.5	2,340	26.9	1,887	27.8	2,339	31.0	2,998	33.3	3,079	34.0
Devon	2,677	23.3	2,331	25.3	2,942	30.3	3,535	32.0	3,916	29.9	4,054	34.0
Dorset	1,591	23.4	1,305	26.1	2,074	30.1	1,563	31.0	2,124	29.9	2,008	30.0
Durham	1,882	23.2	1,681	25.5	1,965	28.5	2,216	31.0	3,138	34.1	3,757	33.0
East Sussex	1,330	22.5	1,516	24.1	1,928	29.7	2,476	31.0	2,906	30.3	2,265	31.0
Essex	3,115	23.1	2,664	24.0	3,723	30.0	4,738	31.0	5,249	30.2	4,949	31.0
Gloucestershire	848	21.7	790	23.2	1,147	29.4	1,632	31.0	1,622	33.1	1,902	30.0
Hampshire	3,755	23.2	3,782	26.4	4,608	30.1	5,823	30.0	6,861	31.9	6,249	32.0
Hereford and Worcester	1,814	25.6	2,131	25.1	2,651	29.1	3,054	33.0	3,990	33.0	3,288	33.0
Hertfordshire	1,902	22.4	2,334	26.8	2,531	31.3	2,671	31.0	3,796	31.4	3,079	29.0
Humberside	1,538	23.0	1,843	25.2	2,305	27.1	1,759	28.0	3,966	31.7	4,105	33.0
Isle of Wight	169	24.1	118	14.7	167	27.8	442	29.0	409	34.1	766	32.0
Kent	4,328	24.0	3,957	26.6	5,073	30.4	5,145	30.0	5,767	30.2	6,187	32.0
Lancashire	4,411	23.1	4,342	26.5	4,910	29.6	7,450	32.0	7,266	33.0	8,600	33.0
Leicestershire	1,571	23.4	2,197	25.2	1,916	29.0	2,541	32.0	3,221	31.9	3,376	31.0
Lincolnshire	1,681	25.1	1,983	26.4	1,469	31.9	2,321	33.0	2,269	29.5	2,029	33.0
Norfolk	1,631	24.0	2,128	25.9	2,039	29.6	2,677	31.0	2,466	31.6	3,289	34.0
North Yorkshire	1,927	25.7	1,535	25.6	1,571	30.8	2,318	33.0	3,103	34.1	2,254	34.0
Northamptonshire	1,313	23.4	1,232	24.2	1,450	29.6	2,610	30.0	2,809	33.4	2,848	32.0
Northumberland	665	23.7	747	29.9	837	31.0	1,236	32.0	1,014	32.7	1,113	34.0
Nottinghamshire	2,946	22.7	2,911	27.2	3,681	30.4	3,423	32.0	4,120	31.5	4,318	33.0
Oxfordshire	729	22.1	1,196	28.5	1,370	28.0	1,632	31.0	2,353	32.2	2,257	30.0
Shropshire	1,260	23.8	1,101	26.2	1,028	26.4	1,656	29.0	1,526	33.2	1,430	31.0
Somerset	1,261	26.3	1,916	27.8	1,971	29.0	2,413	32.0	2,861	34.9	3,089	33.0
Staffordshire	2,674	24.3	3,127	27.0	3,430	29.3	3,798	32.0	5,024	33.3	5,250	33.0
Suffolk	776	21.0	889	24.1	1,395	29.7	1,904	32.0	2,471	32.5	2,304	31.0
Surrey	2,295	22.7	2,197	25.2	2,622	27.3	3,209	32.0	3,126	31.3	2,697	31.0
Warwickshire	1,256	23.3	897	25.6	1,190	30.5	1,368	31.0	1,751	30.7	1,694	30.0
West Sussex	1,550	22.8	1,300	24.5	1,637	28.2	1,666	31.0	2,267	33.3	1,662	35.0
Wiltshire	1,220	24.4	1,669	27.8	1,548	31.6	2,249	34.0	2,112	30.2	1,551	30.0

[1] Not applicable.
[2] Costs based on less than five people are not shown.
[3] Staff who left teaching prior to the abolition of ILEA and have now retired, may still be recorded to ILEA as the last known LEA of employment.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the private employment agencies used by her Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for her Department, *(c)* the total cost to her Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16176]

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment her

Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings her Department occupies; and if she will make a statement. [16314]

Mr. Robin Squire: The DfEE has, through its facilities management and purchasing organisation, arrangements for assessing the presence of both hazardous and ozone-depleting substances. Assessments are carried out in accordance with current regulations and where appropriate, the Department has taken the necessary action either to eliminate their use or minimise the effects of the substances.

Teachers (Devon Education Authority)

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers are currently employed by the Devon education authority and how many there were in 1992. [16538]

Mr. Forth: The numbers of teachers employed by Devon LEA are shown in the table. Staff in grant-maintained schools are excluded.

Full-time equivalent numbers of teachers in the LEA-maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special education sector.

January	*Full-time equivalent*
1992	7,330
1996	7,450

Home Teaching

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls of statutory school age are being taught at home; and how many of these have been excluded from maintained schools for behavioural problems. [16434]

Mr. Forth: This information is not available centrally.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of her Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if she will list the meetings of the Committee which (a) and (b) have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16565]

Mr. Robin Squire: No Ministers from the Department for Education and Employment have attended a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee.

Skills Shortages

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement about the effect of skills shortages on small firms. [15060]

Mr. Paice: In 1994, only 8 per cent. of employers with fewer than 25 employees reported that they had a vacancy which was proving hard to fill. Some 75 per cent. of these employers reported that the vacancies were affecting their business. More recent surveys of larger employers suggest that there has not been any substantial rise in recruitment difficulties since 1994. A shortage of skills is only one of a number of factors which can lead to recruitment difficulties.

Teachers' Pension Fund

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the notional amount of money in the teachers' pension fund; and how much notional interest this generates per annum. [16130]

Mrs. Gillan: The notional balance of the teachers' superannuation account at 31 March 1994 was £26,666 million, and at 31 March 1995 was £28,440 million. The interest of notional investments credited to the account during this period was £2,023 million. More recent figures are not yet available.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what account is taken of revenue generated by the teachers' pension fund when calculating the fund's expenditure against yearly revenue. [16131]

Mrs. Gillan: The teachers' superannuation vote—class IX, vote 2—takes account of expenditure on teachers' pensions and income from employers' and employees' contributions. It does not take account of notional interest generated by the notional investments of the teacher's pension fund. This is recorded in the teachers' superannuation account, which is used by the Government actuary to carry out his quinquennial reviews of the teachers' superannuation scheme.

"Work and the Family"

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many responses she has received to the consultation paper, "Work and the Family"; when she expects to publish results of the consultation exercise; and when she expects to announce Government proposals. [16207]

Mrs. Gillan: I have received 343 responses from a total of 305 organisations and individuals. I expect to be able to make a statement on the Government's proposed way forward in the spring.

Bradfield House School

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received relating to care arrangements for boys at Bradfield House school, Cullompton, Devon; and what action she has taken in response. [16348]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department has, over the last year, received representations from a number of sources, including Devon social services department, the police and local residents, over the adequacy of arrangements for the care and behaviour of pupils at Bradfield House school. The issues were taken up with the school, as a result of which an agreement was prepared between the school, Devon social services department and the police, for implementing measures to improve behaviour and care.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of Bradfield House school, Cullompton, Devon; [16332]

(2) when the Office for Standards in Education next intends to inspect Bradfield House school, Cullompton; and if the report will be made public; [16345]

(3) what measures are being taken to ensure Ofsted and social services reports into Bradfield house school, Cullompton, Devon are made available to those local authorities paying for boys at the school. [16346]

Mrs. Gillan: These are matters for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. I have asked Mr. Chris Woodhead to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action was taken by her Department in response to the 1994 Ofsted report into Bradfield House school, Cullompton, Devon. [16349]

Mrs. Gillan: Following the Ofsted inspection in February 1994, the Department wrote to Bradfield House school requesting that attention be given to a number of serious weaknesses which had been identified. HM Inspectors have undertaken a number of follow-up visits to the school since then and discussions are continuing.

Teachers (Criminal Record Checks)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teachers were subject to criminal record checks in the year to 31 March 1996 in England and Wales. [16586]

Mrs. Gillan: The information requested is not available centrally.

School Governors (Criminal Record Checks)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements she has put in place to check the criminal records of school governors. [16592]

Mrs. Gillan: School governors are not covered by the present arrangements for criminal record checks because they do not satisfy the criterion of having substantial unsupervised access to children on a regular basis. However, the new arrangements that the Government are proposing in the Police Bill [*Lords*] will enable criminal record checks to be made on governors and a range of other groups that are not covered at present.

TRANSPORT

Rail Services

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provision he is making for the cost of rail services secured by English passenger transport executives in 1997–98. [16949]

Mr. Watts: A special grant report has been laid before the House for the payment of metropolitan railways passenger services grant in 1997–98 to English passenger transport authorities. The main purpose of the MRPSG is to provide support, in 1997–98, to those PTAs for the local rail services secured by those PTAs' passenger transport executives under the terms of franchise agreements with franchise operators and the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising.

Road Traffic Reduction Measures

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he made of the relative merits of *(a)* traffic reduction and *(b)* congestion reduction measures prior to giving backing to some aspects of the Road Traffic (Reduction) Bill; and if he will make a statement. [16014]

Mr. Watts: We believe that any such assessment are for local highway authorities to make, taking local circumstances into account. In practice, strategies for addressing the problems consequent on traffic growth need to encompass a variety of measures to influence demand, improve traffic flow and improve accessibility. The relative balance will depend on specific local circumstances.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made to date by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment in its examination of the relationship between traffic growth, transport investment and economic growth; when he expects to receive the report of that committee; and if he will make it his policy not to proceed with, or facilitate the progress of, legislation in this area until such time as that report has been received and studied by his Department. [16015]

Mr. Watts: The Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment started its examination of the relationship between traffic growth, transport investment and economic growth at the end of last year and is expected to report its findings at the end of 1998.

Meanwhile, the Government will continue to promote or support such transport legislation as they consider appropriate, taking account of the available evidence.

Driving Instruction

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated relating to the relative effectiveness of a learner driver learning to drive with a professional instructor or a member of the learner driver's family; [16333]

(2) if he will make a statement on the research his Department proposes to commission from Surrey university into teaching methods for learner drivers, indicating the *(a)* cost and *(b)* duration of contracts and the objectives of the research. [16344]

Mr. Bowis: We have commissioned the university of Surrey to compare the effects of formal and informal training of learner drivers. The contract was awarded in August 1995 and is due for completion by August 1998. The estimated cost is £269,000.

The objectives of the research are: *(a)* to compare the experience gained and instruction given in the course of (i) professional driving lessons and (ii) practice with friends and relations; *(b)* to monitor the progress of drivers engaged in learning to drive using each method in isolation and a mix of the two methods; *(c)* to identify

differences in the level of skill, performance and situational awareness of the different groups and how this changes over time; and *(d)* to develop recommendations for driver training and practice.

Road Contracts

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the forecast Government expenditure for each of the next three decades for each of the design, build, finance and operate road contracts that have been let or are part of the current trunk roads programme; [15451]

(2) how much is to be paid to the contractor per vehicle or vehicle kilometre in shadow tolls for use of the road for each design, build, finance and operate contract let; [15452]

(3) what are his Department's forecasts for daily vehicle usage for each of the next three decades for each of the roads covered by a current or planned design, build, finance and operate contract. [15453]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Cynog Dafis, dated 19 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about DBFO road contracts.

The estimated payments for individual contracts are commercially confidential. However the following figures illustrate by each of the three DBFO tranches, the forecast average annual figure of government expenditure over each of the next three decades:

£ million

Tranche	*1997–98 to 2006–07*	*2007–08 to 2016–17*	*2017–18 to 2026–27*
Tranche 1	99	127	94
Tranche 1A	78	102	120
Tranche 2[1]	126	201	205
Totals	303	430	419

[1] Include M6 Carlisle to Guardsmill and A40 West London Approach DBFOs.

Please note these figures which are in cash prices will vary according to the usage of the DBFO road and the performance of the DBFO Company. The figures do not include some additional but relatively minor future lump sum payments covering for example archaeological works. Because of their uncertain nature these are extremely difficult to estimate.

With regard to the other two questions, the amounts paid to the contractor per vehicle or vehicle kilometre and the Department's forecasts for daily vehicle usage over the next three decades, cannot be provided for commercial reasons.

Road Lighting

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria he uses to decide which lengths of motorway are lit. [16228]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 19 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking what criteria he uses to decide which lengths of motorway are lit.

The decision whether to light in a particular case is taken following consideration of a full appraisal of the proposed scheme. This includes an economic assessment of the capital, maintenance and energy costs set against the potential savings as a result of the reduction in night time personal injury accidents, calculated over the life of the lighting scheme. A full assessment of the environmental factors is taken into account.

London Transport Finance

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total investment and planned investment by London Transport in *(a)* London Underground core business, *(b)* London Buses, *(c)* tendered bus division, *(d)* docklands light railway, *(e)* new lines and extensions, and *(f)* other matters in each year between 1978 and 1999–2000 in (i) cash prices and (ii) 1996–97 prices. [16026]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is set out in the tables[1]:

At cash prices £ million:

Year	*LU core*	*London buses*	*Tendered bus division*	*London transport buses*	*DLR*[2]	*New lines and extensions*	*Other*	*Total*
1978	47	19	—	—	—	—	—	66
1979	65	35	—	—	—	—	—	100
1980	78	45	—	—	—	—	—	123
1981	91	56	—	—	—	—	—	147
1982	82	45	—	—	—	—	—	127
1983	110	58	—	—	—	—	—	168
1984–85[3]	147	60	—	—	33	—	—	240
1985–86	135	40	—	—	33	—	26	234
1986–87	171	36	—	—	16	—	18	241
1987–88	213	20	—	—	61	—	—	294
1988–89	215	25	1	—	51	6	14	312
1989–90	307	27	1	—	93	13	2	443
1990–91	414	28	1	—	139	45	7	634
1991–92	298	38	1	—	162	71	12	582
1992–93	632	46	1	—	—	96	14	789
1993–94	485	23	—	—	—	301	12	821
1994–95	528	2	—	9	—	401	14	954

At cash prices £ million:

Year	LU core	London buses	Tendered bus division	London transport buses	DLR[2]	New lines and extensions	Other	Total
1995–96	561	—	—	10	—	526	18	1,115
1996–97[3,4,6]	514	—	—	13	—	544	12	1,083
1997–98[5]	Estimates not yet available for these years.							
1998–99[5]								
1999–2000[5]								

[1] Figures provided by London Transport.
[2] Responsibility for the Docklands Light Railway was transferred to the London Docklands Development Corporation from 1992–93 onwards.
[3] Fifteen months accounting period.
[4] Estimated outturn.
[5] Apportionment of investment at outturn between LT Core business and the JLE will be determined by LT in the light of emerging requirements.
[6] Includes Croydon Tramlink.

At 1996–97 prices

Year	LU core	London Buses	Tendered bus division	London Transport buses	DLR[1]	New lines and extensions	Other	Total
1978	144	58	—	—	—	—	—	202
1979	170	92	—	—	—	—	—	262
1980	173	99	—	—	—	—	—	272
1981	184	113	—	—	—	—	—	297
1982	154	85	—	—	—	—	—	239
1983	198	105	—	—	—	—	—	303
1984—85[2]	252	103	—	—	57	—	—	412
1985–86	220	65	—	—	54	—	42	381
1986–87	270	57	—	—	25	—	28	380
1987–88	319	30	—	—	92	—	—	441
1988–89	302	35	1	—	72	8	20	438
1989–90	403	36	1	—	122	17	3	582
1990–91	504	34	1	—	169	55	8	771
1991–92	341	43	1	—	185	81	14	665
1992–93	693	51	1	—	—	105	15	865
1993–94	517	24	—	—	—	321	13	875
1994–95	553	2	—	9	—	420	15	999
1995–96	573	—	—	10	—	538	19	1,140
1996–97[3,4,5]	514	—	—	13	—	544	12	1,083
1997–98[4]	Estimates not yet available for these years							
1998–99[4]								
1999–2000[4]								

[1] Responsibility for the Docklands Light Railway was transferred to the London Docklands Development Corporation from 1992–93 onwards.
[2] 15 months accounting period.
[3] Estimated outturn.
[4] Apportionment of investment at outturn between LT Core business and the JLE will be determined by LT in the light of emerging requirements.
[5] Includes Croydon Tramlink.
Figures provided by London Transport.

Air Traffic Control Centre (Swanwick)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what role Ministers had in the decision to proceed with the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick; and what involvement they have had with the development since. [16336]

Mr. Bowis: The Secretary of State is accountable to Parliament for ensuring that the financial and other controls of the CAA conform to the requirements both of propriety and good financial management.

Capital investment by the CAA is approved and monitored within the framework set by the White Papers of 1967 (Cmnd 3437) and 1978 (Cmnd 7131). The Department is responsible for, inter alia, ensuring that investment appraisal methods used by the CAA are sound and applied consistently in practice.

The Department also becomes involved in the approval and scrutiny of specific projects, and exercises a general oversight of the authority's financial control and monitoring procedures.

This process has been applied to the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the Civil Aviation Authority's additional expenses from the delays in the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick becoming operational; and what contractual recourse the Civil Aviation Authority has to recoup these costs; [16340]

(2) what compensatory payments the Civil Aviation Authority will be seeking for the late operational completion of the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick and from which companies. [16342]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply of 24 June 1996, *Official Report* column *29*, to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody).

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Civil Aviation Authority *(a)* originally expected and *(b)* now expects the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick to be operational. [16337]

Mr. Bowis: The original target date set for the centre to enter operation was the end of 1996. The CAA has announced that, in view of problems that have arisen in integrating the software sub-systems of the air traffic management system, the target date for operation is now March 1998.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what procedure was used by the Civil Aviation Authority in commissioning the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick; what checks were carried out on companies bidding for work under the project; and what advice the CAA took in relation to the drafting of the clauses in the contract for the new centre in relation to penalty payments for delays; [16338]

(2) if he will list the contractors involved in the construction of the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick and the parts of the project which each is responsible for. [16343]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chairman of the CAA to reply direct to the hon. Member on this matter.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what concerns officials from his Department have expressed to the Civil Aviation Authority about *(a)* delays and *(b)* additional costs in commissioning the new control centre at Swanwick; [16341]

(2) what discussions officials of his Department have had with the Civil Aviation Authority in relation to the final commissioning of the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick and the contractual arrangements governing the costs incurred by the CAA from delays in the facility becoming operational. [16339]

Mr. Bowis: Officials from the Department have discussed with the CAA the authority's plans to meet forecast capacity requirements despite the delay. They have likewise discussed the financial implications of the delay, bearing in mind that the additional costs required to complete the new en-route centre will be borne entirely by the project contractor.

TREASURY

Income Tax (Scotland)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individual income tax payers paid their tax via a Scottish Inland Revenue office in each of the last five years. [15931]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The information is not available.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Scottish-based income tax payers have their tax affairs handled by tax offices outside Scotland; and what is the location of the tax offices. [15930]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 February 1997]:* The information is not available. In particular, taxpayer records of employees are grouped by reference to their employers. All the employees of a particular employer will be dealt with by the same tax office, which might be located anywhere in the UK. It is not immediately possible to distinguish those employees living in Scotland from those living in other parts of the UK.

Commercial Property Rents (Taxation)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to make it his policy to suspend the implementation of the proposed changes to the option to tax provisions in relation to the value added tax treatment of commercial property rents; what consultations he has had with developers and landlords of commercial property before the decision to implement those changes; what further plans he has to consult about the impact of those changes; and if he will make a statement. [15377]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* I made a statement on the range of possible Report stage amendments during the Standing Committee debate on 11 February. Anti-avoidance measures are not normally discussed before the Budget statement, although on this occasion some general discussions took place between customs and a property sector liaison group. There has since been a series of meetings with the major trade and professional bodies representing the industry.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received concerning the decision to close the option to tax provisions in relation to the value added tax treatment of commercial property rents; and if he will make a statement. [15376]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* I have received a variety of different representations on clause 37 in the Finance Bill, and I made a statement on the range of possible Report stage amendments during the Standing Committee debate on 11 February.

European Union Finance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the contributions of the United Kingdom to the general budget of the European Community from 1973 to 1996, at 1996 prices, under the headings agricultural and sugar levies, customs duties, gross VAT and GNP contributions, and *(b)* UK receipts under the headings of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund, European regional development fund, European social fund refunds and/or abatements, *(c)* annual gross and net contributions and/or receipts together with other items and *(d)* annual percentage of receipts to contributions with, and without, refunds or rebates. [14327]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is set out in the table.

UK contributions to the EC budget, 1996 prices

(£ million)

Period[1]	*Agriculture and sugar levels*	*Customs duties*	*VAT based contributions (net of adjustments)*[2,3]	*GNP based contributions (net of adjustments)*[3]	*Other contributions*[4]	*Adjustments*[5]	*Gross contributions (total)*[6]
1973	60	949			201		1,210
1974	81	1,117			35	–189	1,053
1975	146	1,465				–49	1,566
1976	151	1,742				–52	1,841
1977	538	2,141				–105	2,574
1978	757	2,234		1,865		–638	4,219
1979	676	2,374	2,267			–963	4,393
1980	585	1,970	1,666			–184	4,044
1981	448	1,767	1,972			277	4,465
1982	586	1,911	2,859			109	5,465
1983	421	1,950	3,105			–78	5,398
1984	456	2,213	2,983			–95	5,556
1985	310	2,118	3,193		605	238	6,464
1986	388	1,976	4,356			418	7,138
1987	536	2,142	5,069			127	7,874
1988	305	2.062	4,272		875	–181	7,334
1989	256	2,181	4,185	402		413	7,437
1990	167	1,921	5,125			637	7,850
1991	233	1,765	4,389	939		–621	6,705
1992	226	1,721	4,810	1,031		–350	7,438
1993	213	1,876	5,312	1,721		–581	8,541
1994	211	1,885	4,396	2,456		–1,403	7,545
1995	208	2,067	4,752	1,680		406	9,113
1996[7]	202	1,989	4,442	2,444		32	9,109

Notes:

[1] Breakdown of the UK gross contributions for the years 1975 to 1977, and of EAGGF, ERDF and ESF for years 1984 to 1985, are taken from the ONS (nee CSO) publications "UK Balance of Payments."

[2] Net of article 131 compensation in 1978, 1979, 1980.

[3] Before adjustments in respect of earlier years' contributions.

[4] Treasury advances and inter-governmental agreements.

[5] Budget adjustments and adjustments to VAT and GNP contributions for earlier years.
Adjustments for the years up to and including 1977, are taken from The Pink Book, 1984 edition.

[6] Components do not always add to totals in this table as all figures have been rounded independently.

[7] 1996 figures are estimates

The rounding convention used in this table is that of rounding to the nearest whole number.

The deflator is adjusted to take account of the abolition of domestic rates.

Sources:

"Statement on the 1996 EC Budget" CM 3350, and earlier editions.

CSO "UK Balance of Payments, 1993 and earlier editions.

HC Deb 11.7.83 c256W.

UK contributions to the EC budget, 1996 prices

£ million

Period[1]	*Negotiated refunds*	*Abatement*	*Gross contributions after refunds and abatement*
1973			1,210
1974			1,053
1975			1,566
1976			1,841
1977			2,574
1978			4,219
1979			4,393
1980	224		3,820
1981	1,423		3,042
1982	1,945		3,520
1983	1,464		3,934
1984	916		4,640
1985	100	–272	6,092
1986		–2,702	4,436
1987		–1,745	6,128
1988		–2,275	5,058
1989		–1,537	5,900
1990		–2,096	5,754
1991		–2,883	3,821

UK contributions to the EC budget, 1996 prices

£ million

Period[1]	*Negotiated refunds*	*Abatement*	*Gross contributions after refunds and abatement*
1992		–2,076	5,362
1993		–2,716	5,826
1994		–1,811	5,733
1995		–1,237	7,876
1996[2]		–2,412	6,697

Notes:

[1] Breakdown of the UK gross contributions for the years 1975 to 1977, and of EAGGF, ERDF and ESF for the years 1984 to 1985, are taken from the ONS (nee CSO) publications "UK Balance of Payments".

[2] 1996 figures are estimates.

The rounding convention used in this table is that of rounding to the nearest whole number.

The deflator is adjusted to take account of the abolition of domestic rates.

Sources:

"Statement on the 1996 EC Budget" Cm 3350, and earlier editions.

CSO "UK Balance of Payments, 1993" and earlier editions.

HC Deb 11.7.83 c256W.

UK contributions to the EC budget, 1996 prices

(£ million)

Period[1]	*EAGGF*[2]	*ERDF*	*ESF*	*Other*[3]	*Total*[4]	*Net contributions*[4]	*Receipts/contributions With refunds and abatement Per cent.*	*Receipts/contributions Without refunds or abatement Per cent.*
1973	421			107	528	682	44	44
1974	652		93	128	873	180	83	83
1975	1,566	5	87	165	1,827	–256	117	117
1976	823	115	44	195	1,177	664	64	64
1977	629	210	171	279	1,289	1,289	50	50
1978	1,030	110	194	313	1,646	2,572	39	39
1979	1,015	194	238	356	1,802	2,590	41	41
1980	1,259	396	217	332	2,204	1,616	58	54
1981	1,403	298	220	306	2,226	815	73	50
1982	1,510	212	290	351	2,363	1,157	67	43
1983	1,963	252	232	314	2,761	1,174	70	51
1984	2,346	319	491	347	3,503	1,138	75	63
1985	1,888	450	420	368	3,125	2,966	51	48
1986	2,188	473	532	332	3,527	909	80	49
1987	2,037	611	648	227	3,524	2,605	57	45
1988	1,968	527	388	230	3,114	1,944	62	42
1989	1,751	462	541	64	2,818	3,083	48	38
1990	1,848	543	278	27	2,696	3,057	47	34
1991	2,033	427	714	18	3,192	628	84	48
1992	2,001	614	482	24	3,121	2,241	58	42
1993	2,414	455	630	21	3,520	2,305	60	41
1994	2,413	638	337	26	3,414	2,320	60	45
1995	2,503	447	775	33	3,757	4,118	48	41
1996[5]	3,408	822	805	57	5,094	1,603	76	56

Notes:

[1] Breakdown of the UK gross contributions for the years 1975 to 1977, and of EAGGF, ERDF and ESF for the years 1984 to 1985, are taken from the ONS (nee CSO) publications "UK Balance of Payments".

[2] Includes stock depreciation payments.

[3] Excludes own resources refunds after 1988.

[4] Components do not always add to totals in this table as all figures have been rounded independently.

[5] 1996 figures are estimates.

The rounding convention used in this table is that of rounding to the nearest whole number.

The deflator is adjusted to take account of the abolition of domestic rates.

Sources:

"Statement on the 1996 EC Budget" Cm 3350, and earlier editions.

CSO "UK Balance of Payments, 1993" and earlier editions.

HC Deb 11.7.83 c256W.

Pensions Mis-selling

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received asserting conflicts of interest in respect of the previous service of the present chairman of the Personal Investment Authority as chief executive of Legal and General Group and in respect of the group's alleged role in mis-selling pensions; and if he will make a statement. [16432]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury has received one such representation recently.

Mr. Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the progress made by the Securities and Investments Board since 25 October 1994 in its inquiries into sales of personal pensions. [16437]

Mrs. Knight: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) on 18 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *635*.

British Agrochemicals Association

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had from British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the past 12 months; what was the subject of those representations; and if he will make a statement. [16288]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have received no representations from British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the past 12 months.

Blind Person's Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of *(a)* the annual cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining from the introduction of an additional personal tax allowance to the value of the blind person's allowance for severely disabled people who pay for personal care with the assistance of payments from their local authority or from the independent living fund. [16097]

Mr. Jack: Reliable information is not available.

Treasury Model

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Treasury model of the economy allows simulated falls in both unemployment and inflation. [15843]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Treasury model could predict a positive relationship between inflation and unemployment in some circumstances. For example, a cut in indirect taxes or imported raw material prices would tend temporarily to reduce inflation and unemployment. The model is available to the public and a copy is held in the House of Commons Library.

Financial Services Act Licences

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* firms have been licensed by each of the regulatory bodies created under the Financial Services Act 1986. [14786]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Details of the number of authorised firms by recognised body which are held on the Securities and Investments Board's central register are reproduced at page 68 of the SIB's annual report 1995–96 which is available in the Library.

General Government Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the range of proportions of the UK GGBR that Scotland has accounted for on the basis of all studies published by Government Departments adopting methodology published in "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1994–95". [16116]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Figures published in the 1996 edition of "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" show that, excluding North sea taxes and privatisation proceeds, the Scottish deficit was about 18 per cent. of the UK deficit in 1994–95. The 1995 edition of GERS gave the equivalent percentage for 1993–94 at 15 per cent., which the 1996 edition subsequently revised upwards to 16 per cent. The 1992 edition of GERS did not contain an estimate of the Scottish deficit but, had it done so, on the figures available at the time, the equivalent ratio for 1990–91 would have been 51 per cent. The latest available estimate of the ratio in 1990–91 is 54 per cent.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

United Nations Industrial Development Organisation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which other EU countries are withdrawing from UNIDO. [16530]

Dr. Liam Fox: No other EU countries have yet announced their intention to withdraw.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British private sector consultancy contracts and how much revenue were received from UNIDO purchases and contracts, in the last year for which figures are available. [16534]

Dr. Fox: In 1996, UNIDO had 22 contracts with UK consultants. The value to the UK from purchases and contracts in that year was £5 million.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations were held with British staff of UNIDO about the decision to withdraw. [16533]

Dr. Fox: None.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has held with EU partners on his decision to withdraw from UNIDO. [16531]

Dr. Fox: No formal consultations took place, but EU partners had been aware for some time of UK concerns about UNIDO.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of the United Kingdom's subscription to UNIDO, in the last year for which figures are available. [16535]

Dr. Fox: The UK contribution to UNIDO for calendar year 1996 was £4.69 million.

Micro-finance

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Overseas Development Agency's policy towards micro-finance. [16855]

Dr. Liam Fox: Micro-finance—savings as well as credit—can be a powerful tool able to benefit large numbers of poor people in a manner which is financially sustainable. Since 1990, we have provided increasing support for projects and institutions engaged in micro-finance, notably through our bilateral programmes in Africa and Asia. Total commitments to date are approximately $100 million and it is a field where we anticipate continuing to deploy significant resources. But experience shows that it is important to assist micro-finance institutions over time to achieve full financial self-sustainability.

In addition to direct support for micro-finance institutions, the Overseas Development Administration is involved in many other related areas. For example, we are active members of the World bank-based consultative group to assist the poorest; ODA chairs the working group on management information systems and reporting standards for micro-finance institutions. ODA is also the major source of funds for a study by the MicroFinance Network, an association of leading MFIs, on the critical subject of the regulation and supervision of MFI, looking at recent experiences in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

We are concerned to assess the impact of micro-finance. The results of a major research project on finance against poverty was published last year. Currently ODA is supporting a study, in collaboration with 10 leading UK non-governmental organisations, on the degree to which women are empowered through micro-finance.

Albania

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in respect of every United Kingdom overseas aid contribution to Albania since 1990 the date it was approved, the value of the aid, United Kingdom expenditure to date and a description of the nature and purpose of the aid project or programme. [16627]

Dr. Liam Fox: British overseas aid expenditure in Albania since 1991, the first year that the UK disbursed funds there, totals £5,001,619. The funds have been disbursed through the know-how fund and the ODA's emergency aid department. Since the know-how fund set up its programme for Albania it has focused on the following priority sectors: financial services; public administration and good government; agriculture; and health. The fund has also run projects in the media and education sectors.

Development assistance projects vary in size of funding from a few hundred pounds to several hundreds of pounds. There are therefore too many to list in full. The following are the projects on which the fund and the ODA have disbursed over £100,000:

Description	£
The Know How Fund	
Farm-land restructuring (November 1992)	113,053
Advice on privatising the Rural Commercial Bank (December 1994)	173,167
Support in setting up the stock exchange and advice on setting up investment funds (November 1995)	191,043
Advice on local Government finance and budgeting (July 1993)	343,329
Attachment of British haematologist to Albanian National Blood Transfusion Service (March 1994)	123,230
Assistance to Albanian National Health Insurance Institute (September 1995)	178,108
Pre-Investment Feasibility Studies since January 1994	139,841
Emergency Aid Department	
Feed The Children—Food, medical and educational supplies (September 1991)	580,000
Feed the Children—Emergency supplies Tropjoe District purchase of 10-ton vehicle (March 1994)	300,405
Feed the Children—Food, hygiene materials, clothing and purchase of 2 trucks, 1 Land Rover, bedding and cooking equipment (March 1995)380,227	
WHO donation to joint WHO/UNICEF appeal—polio epidemic (October 1996)	100,000
British Red Cross—Purchase, shipment and distribution of wheat flour and miscellaneous relief goods (February 1992)	287,369

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list by type and funding the know-how fund projects in Albania since 1992. [16411]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The know-how fund set up its programme for Albania in 1993. Since then, it has focused on the following priority sectors: financial services; public administration and good government; agriculture; and health. The fund has also run projects in the media and education sectors.

Projects vary in size of funding from a few hundred pounds to several hundreds of pounds. There are therefore too many to list in full. The following are the projects on which the fund has disbursed over £100,000 since 1993:

Projects	£
Farm-land restructuring	113,053
Advice on privatising the Rural Commercial bank	173,167
Support in setting up the stock exchange and advice on setting up investment funds	191,043
Advice on local government finance and budgeting	343,329
Attachment of British haematologist to Albanian National Blood Transfusion Service	123,230
Assistance to Albanian National Health Insurance Institute	178,108
Pre-investment feasibility studies since January 1994	139,841

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the use of the diplomatic bag to convey party political propaganda to Tirana. [16403]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: None.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the individuals supported by the Westminster Foundation in Albania since 1992. [16409]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The Westminster Foundation, whose board is drawn from all political parties in the House of Commons, is independent of the Government in taking decisions on which projects it supports.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Albanian Government officials made Foreign and Commonwealth Office sponsored visits to the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1993, *(b)* 1994, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1996 and *(e)* 1997. [16402]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Visits sponsored by the Department to the UK by Albanian Government officials numbered, in financial years—1993–94, 11 (five visit programmes); 1994–95, 13 (three visit programmes); 1995–96, three (two visit programmes); 1996–97, one.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Albanian government in respect of their detention of *(a)* opposition leaders and *(b)* journalists. [16400]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have raised with the Albanian Deputy Foreign Minister our deep concern at reports of arrests and intimidation by the authorities in Tirana. We have also pressed in the European Union for EU ambassadors to express their concern collectively.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of *(a)* energy use and *(b)* waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16419]

Mr. Hanley: This Department continually strives to reduce the impact of its activities on the environment. We retain the services of consultants who advise on energy efficiency and environmental matters for the UK estate. For example, a recent line analysis of electrical demand in the main building has identified possibilities for additional

savings on power consumption. Most recently, a report in the management of waste paper has been prepared which will be used to enhance the existing recycling system.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *643–44*, regarding the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through environmental auditing, if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated this within those buildings his Department *(a)* occupies in the United kingdom and *(b)* occupies abroad; and if he will make a statement. [16444]

Mr. Hanley: Both diplomatic and overseas development wings of the Department retain the services of consultants to advised on energy efficiency and environmental matters concerning buildings occupied in the United Kingdom. The introduction of energy efficient lighting, modern boiler controls and optimisers have all contributed to cutting energy usage and costs. When maintaining, building or refurbishing properties for occupation overseas, the Department encourages consideration of the issues promoted by the Building Research Establishment/environmental assessment method. The Department also provides guidance to all overseas posts to enable compliance with global environmental issues.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16279]

Mr. Hanley: Both wings of this Department maintain registers of hazardous materials—such as asbestos or polychlorinatedbiphenyls—in its buildings in UK and overseas. The chemical treatment programme for legionella is managed by specialists in the field.

We are careful not to endanger the further depletion of the ozone layer, through a responsible procurement and disposal policy at home and abroad. Improvements in insulation levels and building services design and installation are encouraged. New air-conditioning systems operate with non-chlorofluorocarbon refrigerants. Halon fire extinguishers have been withdrawn. Advisory leaflets on CFCs, halon and energy conservation have been issued.

Banaban People

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation of the Banaban population in Fiji; what compensation has been paid to the Banaban people by Her Majesty's Government since 1981; and what part Her Majesty's Government have played in the environmental rehabilitation of the island of Banaba. [14994]

Mr. Hanley: The Banaban community, based principally on the island of Rabi in Fiji, participate fully in Fiji's civil affairs. Its people retain links with their home island, where some still live, which is now part of the Republic of Kiribati. The Banabans enjoy special constitutional safeguards in both Fiji and Kiribati.

No payments have been made since the ex gratia 14.5 million Australian dollars compensation settlement by the British Phosphate Commission in 1981. Her Majesty's Government have played no part in Banaba's environmental rehabilitation since 1981, as this remains the responsibility of the Kiribati Government.

ENVIRONMENT

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to pages 24 and 29, volume 6 of the appropriation accounts 1995–96, class VII, vote 3—HC ii–VI, Session 1996–97—what factors underlay the reductions in expenditure on *(a)* environmental protection in industry, with particular reference to the reasons for underbidding in the programme for the promotion of positive environmental management and *(b)* OECD contribution towards the framework convention on climate change. [15660]

Mr. Gummer: The promotion of positive environmental management in industry programme was established in response to a recommendation from the Advisory Committee on Business and Environment. It supports intermediaries working to raise awareness of environmental issues among small and medium firms and helps them improve their environmental performance. The programme primarily supports six pilot local initiatives, and expenditure on these was as planned during 1995–96. A small proportion of the budget was set aside for work with other business support organisations, but fewer suitable projects were identified than originally envisaged, leading to expenditure lower than forecast.

The initial UK allocation for contributions to international climate change organisations was £725,000 for 1995–96. This included an allowance for the UK contribution to the administrative cost of the framework convention on climate change. Negotiations at the first conference of the parties in spring 1995 led to a reduction in the draft convention budget for 1996 and it was also decided that the cost of conference and subsidiary body meetings would be funded form the main UN budget. Hence, actual expenditure in 1995–96 was £224,000 lower than originally estimated.

Packaging Waste Regulations

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to issue the statutory guidance regarding the packaging waste regulations. [15574]

Mr. Gummer: The Advisory Committee on Packaging, chaired by Sir Peter Parker, is currently developing recommendations to the Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on the preparation of statutory guidance on compliance with the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations, which are before the House. I understand that the advisory committee hopes to make public its recommendations in the very near future. The agencies will be responsible for issuing statutory guidance once the regulations have been made.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which 10 local councils in England have the highest budget deficits. [16158]

Sir Paul Beresford: All local authorities are required to set balanced budgets, taking into account the amount of financial reserves that they estimate they will use in the year to finance expenditure. The following authorities budgeted to draw down the highest amounts from reserves in 1996–97:

Budgeted use of reserves 1996–97

	£000s
City of London	41,343
Hampshire	35,375
Metropolitan Police Authority	26,519
Staffordshire	21,002
Berkshire	18,474
Cheshire	18,000
Birmingham	17,658
Kent	17,088
Hereford and Worcester	16,020
Hertfordshire	15,410

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the total amount of local authority debt and local authority unused capital receipts in (i) 1985, (ii) 1990 and (iii) the latest year for which figures are available. [16162]

Sir Paul Beresford: The amounts outstanding at 31 March each year were:

	Total debt £ billion	*Usable capital receipts £ billion*
1985	31.6	n/a
1990	41.2	2.4
1996	37.6	1.1

Source:
Debt: DOE borrowing and lending surveys and Public Works Loan Board.
Capital receipts: capital outturn returns.

The total debt figures include both long term and short-term borrowing; £4.5 billion of local authority debt, mainly amounts borrowed from the Public Works Loan Board, was commuted by the Government in 1992.

Figures for the amounts of set-aside capital receipts are not available. These form part of the provision for credit liabilities, which also includes amounts set aside from revenue. It is not possible to give figures for usable capital receipts for years before 1990, when a different capital finance system was in operation.

Business Improvement Districts

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his assessment of business improvement districts; what measures would be required to introduce similar initiatives in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [16211]

Sir Paul Beresford: The research is expected to be completed by late spring. We will consider the results of that research carefully in determining whether this approach could be applied in the UK context.

Glenn and John Howells

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will assist Kirklees metropolitan borough council in meeting the costs of providing secure accommodation for Glenn and John Howells. [16439]

Sir Paul Beresford: Local authorities are responsible for decisions on how to accommodate young persons remanded by the courts to local authority accommodation. Provision for these costs is included within the children's personal social services block of the standard spending assessment. This provision is not identified specifically.

Credit Liabilities

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority the amount set aside as provision for credit liabilities as at 31 March 1996. [16474]

Mr. Curry: A list of the provision for credit liabilities at 31 March 1996 for each English local authority has been placed in the Library of the House.

Planning Policy Guidance (Countryside)

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to publish the revised planning policy guidance note 7 on the countryside; and if he will make a statement. [16899]

Mr. Gummer: I am today publishing revised policy planning guidance note 7 on the countryside.

This new guidance note carries forward our commitment to a living countryside. It will help to ensure that the countryside is increasingly a place in which communities and businesses can thrive, while maintaining the unique qualities which make the English countryside such an attractive place in which to live and work.

The revised note fulfils key commitments in our rural White Paper by giving greater encouragement to business diversification in the countryside while ensuring that necessary development is of a good quality, complementing and respecting the character of the countryside around it.

The majority of the over 400 responses to the consultation draft welcomed the revised PPG7's comprehensive coverage of planning in the countryside and felt that it struck a fair and realistic balance between environmental protection and the need to stimulate rural economic activity. There was particular support for its coverage of sustainable development principles; its recognition of the interdependence between urban and rural policies; its acknowledgement of the value of rural strategies and its increased emphasis on good design.

The new guidance note restates and clarifies policy on protecting from development the best agricultural land as a national resource. This means that we will maintain a stock of the best agricultural land, with its versatility and efficiency for farming, while making it clear that a more flexible approach may be adopted where there is an

overriding need for development and any alternative land has a recognised, high environmental value or there is little suitable land of lower agricultural quality available.

In addition, the guidance note clarifies policy on the reuse of rural buildings, allowing greater discrimination in favour of reuse for business rather than residential purposes; it stresses the importance of thoroughly checking the lawfulness of developments to be carried out under agricultural permitted development rights; advises on the possible removal of new buildings which abuse permitted development rights, without placing unnecessary additional burdens on genuine farmers; and advises local planning authorities on the scope for making planning permission conditional on the removal of unused ugly or derelict buildings in certain circumstances.

I am also pleased to announce today that Charles Nunneley, chairman of the National Trust, has agreed to chair a small working group on the possible introduction of a rural business use class. This proposal, also included in the Rural White Paper, is designed to encourage enterprise in rural areas by giving local planning authorities an additional control, where needed, over the intensification of new businesses. The working party will consider how best to achieve the implementation of this proposal, taking account of the various practical issues and difficulties identified during the recent consultation exercise.

Thames Barrage Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total cost of the Thames barrage scheme; and how much of this cost was met by central Government. [16446]

Mr. Boswell: I have been asked to reply.

The total cost of works under the Thames Barrier and Flood Protection Act 1972 was some £700 million, with the Thames barrier itself costing some £450 million and associated downstream works, including a second barrier at Barking, accounting for the remainder. Government grants made under the Act totalled approximatly £540 million.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Crystal Palace National Sports Centre

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she plans to take to ensure the future of the Crystal Palace national sports centre as *(a)* a venue for national and international sporting events and *(b)* a training centre for British athletes. [15823]

Mr. Sproat: The future of facilities at Crystal Palace national sports centre is, in the first instance, a matter for the London borough of Bromley and the English Sports Council. An independent feasibility study is being undertaken on behalf of the London borough of Bromley and the English Sports Council as one stage in the process to determine the future needs and use of the national sports centre. The English Sports Council has given an assurance that no decisions about long-term investment in the future of the centre will be taken without prior consultation with the relevant sporting governing bodies.

Sports Council Chairmen

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the contract of *(a)* the chairman of the United Kingdom Sports Council and *(b)* the chairman of the English Sports Council, indicating their remuneration. [12638]

Mr. Sproat: Lord MacLaurin of Knebworth was appointed chairman-designate of the United Kingdom Sports Council from 1 April 1995. Lord MacLaurin's position as chairman of the United Kingdom Sports Council was formalised from the 19 September 1996 following the issue of letters patent under the great seal granting charters of incorporation to the new council. The appointment will expire in March 1998. Lord MacLaurin has chosen not to draw remuneration for this position.

Sir Rodney Walker was appointed chairman of the Great Britain Sports Council and chairman-designate of English Sports Council from 1 October 1994. Sir Rodney's position as chairman of the English Sports Council was formalised from the 19 September 1996 following the issue of letters patent under the great seal granting charters of incorporation to the new council. This appointment will expire in September 2001. Sir Rodney receives a non-pensionable remuneration of £21,692 per annum.

Television Broadcasting

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the cost of the engineering changes to UK transmitters of allowing the removal of power restrictions at the Clermont Carn transmitter in the Republic of Ireland in order to improve RTE coverage in Northern Ireland; and who will pay the costs of such changes. [15821]

Mr. Sproat: The Irish Minister for the Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht has given an assurance that RTE has undertaken to bear the engineering costs of UK broadcasters directly attributable to the proposed alterations to the Clermont Carn transmitter. The BBC and Independent Television Commission, which are responsible for television transmission arrangements in the UK, have estimated that the engineering costs of changes to UK transmitters attributable to an increase in the power of transmission from the Clermont Carn transmitter could be in the region of £650,000.

"Success Through Partnership: A Strategy for Tourism"

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much it cost to *(a)* print and *(b)* reprint the document, "Success Through Partnership: A Strategy for Tourism". [16193]

Mr. Sproat: The cost of printing "Success through Partnership: A Strategy for Tourism" was £23,040. As originally planned, 1,000 copies were printed and delivered in advance for the launch of the document. A further 28,000 copies were delivered later for subsequent distribution to various organisations.

Public Libraries Review

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will publish the public libraries review; and if she will make a statement. [17105]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have today published "Reading the Future", the Government's review of public libraries in England.

Public libraries are a great national asset. The Government are committed to ensuring that the public library system is equipped to face the challenges of the future, of which the single most important one will arise from the impact of information technology. Libraries are likely to be a key element in providing access to electronically stored information. Technology is changing so fast that plans for introducing new systems of technology need to be flexible enough to take account of both the changes and their cost and the need for libraries to play the fullest appropriate role in this revolution. The Government have therefore asked a working group set up by the Library and Information Commission to report by the end of July on how public libraries in England should respond effectively to this challenge.

The other main issues addressed by the review are:

- that the core book lending and reference services will remain free of charge;
- public libraries should match opening hours to the needs of their users;
- after 2001, the money that currently goes on millennium projects will go to a new Information and Communication Technology Fund, from which libraries should greatly benefit;
- a £3 million contribution over three years from the Wolfson Foundation to the £6 million challenge fund to improve facilities in English public libraries announced in my Department's budget statement;
- that libraries need to take further advantage of the opportunities offered by private sector partnerships, and a more commercially aware management style, including franchising, voluntary contracting-out of operations, and sponsorship;
- libraries will benefit from the new £300 million information and communication technology fund post-2000;
- to raise standards in public libraries, all English library authorities will be required to produce annually a Public Library Plan which will set out how libraries have performed compared with what they achieved the previous year, the standards they set themselves for the latest year, and the standards achieved by other libraries;
- libraries are the focal point at the heart of many communities and service providers should build on that, for example by being more responsive to what local users want; using local volunteers; offering homework facilities for children; and encouraging appreciation of literature among users through activities such as live readings by authors.

I have today placed copies of the review in the Libraries of both Houses and am arranging for copies to be sent to a wide range of interested parties. Further copies are available on request from my Department.

UK Sports Council

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she intends to announce the filling of vacancies on the UK Sports Council [17102]

Mr. Sproat: Further to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 4 February 1996, *Official Report*, columns *583–86*, I am pleased to announce that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has appointed Mr. Adrian Moorhouse MBE and Mrs. Judy Simpson as members of the United Kingdom sports council. Mr. Moorhouse had a hugely successful swimming career, including an olympic gold medal in the 100 m breaststroke at the Seoul Olympics in 1988. He is now managing director of Lane 4 Management Group. Mrs. Simpson is a former Commonwealth champion in the heptathlon, and is now president of the Women's Sports Foundation. Both appointees are also members of the English Sports Council's national lottery sports panel. I am confident that the skills and experience which Mr. Moorhouse and Mrs. Simpson bring with them will make them a great asset to the new United Kingdom Sports Council.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service Magazine

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the total annual cost of producing, printing and distributing "Overview-The Magazine for the Modern Civil Service"; and if he will make a statement. [16294]

Mr. Freeman: "Overview—The Magazine for the Modern Civil Service" is published by Public Sector Information, a privately owned company.

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15924]

Mr. Bates: The Office of Public Service does not enforce any statutory minimum age requirements.

Engagements

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Friday 31 January. [16335]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I had a number of meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

Special Educational Needs Tribunals

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster for what reasons Her Majesty's Government recommended to Parliament that presidents of special educational needs tribunals or members of a panel of persons appointed to act as chairs or members of such tribunals should be ineligible to become hon. Members. [16621]

Mr. Freeman: The president, chairmen and members of the special educational needs tribunal will be statutorily disqualified from membership of the House of Commons on the ground that these offices require demonstrable political impartiality. This will formalise the current position whereby members of the tribunal are disqualified from holding political office under the terms and conditions governing their appointment.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library a copy of Sir Peter Levene's letter to all Departments of 27 July 1995 regarding the appointment of consultants. [15842]

Mr. Freeman: The text of Sir Peter Levene's letter of that date, which is concerned primarily with the establishment of ministerial approval limits in the hire of external consultants, has been placed in the Library.

Bletchley Park

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how and when the Government and the Post Office obtained Bletchley Park; [15674]

(2) how much was paid, and to whom, from Bletchley Park. [15838]

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated under the terms of its framework document to the Property Advisers to the civil Estate under its chief executive, Mr. Neil Borrett. The agency is therefore responding to these questions.

Letter from N. E. Borrett to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 17 February 1997:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to respond to your two Questions on Bletchley Park.

The freehold of the entire site was acquired by the predecessors of the Secretary of State for the Environment (Ministry of Works) assembling a number of parcels of land and buildings by means of nine separate conveyances between the years 1937 and 1964. A substantial portion of the site comprising 26 acres, was sold at privatisation to British Telecom, in 1984 for £2.3 million, leaving a residue of approximately 31.4 acres with the Secretary of State.

Unfortunately the records and deeds in our possession do not go back to the original conveyances. The property now comprises seven registered titles. However, there is mention in the deeds of Ernest Ingram being the vendor for two parcels, together with SS Holdings on a further parcel. The purchase price for the largest of these three areas amounted to £3,300 in 1952, whilst for the smaller one the consideration was £120 in 1949.

My understanding is that the land was originally acquired for the government's Code and Cipher school, which subsequently became part of GCHQ after the war.

Under the "Crichel Down" rules we are not required to offer the land back to former owners where the use has materially changed. Our view is that the use has materially changed and we do not intend to offer back.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Fraud

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list by individual benefit the total amount of money his Department estimates has been saved by detecting fraud in each of the last five years; [14578]

(2) what were the estimated total savings to public funds accruing from the detection of fraud in each of the last five years. [14581]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Year	*Savings recorded by DSS* £	*Savings recorded by Local Authorities*[1] £	*Total* £
1991–92	447m	n/a	447m
1992–93	558m	n/a	558m
1993–94	654m	92m	746m
1994–95	717m	171m	888m
1995–96	1.2bn[2]	224m	1.4bn

Notes:

[1] No central records are kept of any local authority savings achieved prior to April 1993.

[2] Includes savings from initiatives in the Security and Control Programme.

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £1 million when under £1 billion and to the nearest £100 million when over.

2. The information is given in terms of Weekly Benefit Savings deriving from activity in the given year, not public expenditure savings which could be accounted for in that year.

Child Support

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many cases there were in the most recent year for which figures are available in which benefits were reduced in respect of a parent with care on income support as a result of a pre-Child Support Agency child maintenance agreement. [15609]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available as maintenance which is in payment as a result of a pre-child support arrangement cannot be separately identified.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of severe disablement allowance there are who are aged under 19 years are in education for *(a)* less than 21 hours per week and *(b)* more than 21 hours where the extra hours are not suitable for a non-disabled person. [15867]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not available.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 9 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *66*, when information about extended payments of housing benefit will be available. [15872]

Mr. Roger Evans: The figures are currently being processed and will be published in the "Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Summary Statistics—Update Number 2" in March. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what customer service standards are

being discussed with the private sector companies shortlisted for the running of the Benefits Agency medical services. [16498]

Mr. Burt: The contract will specify the customer service standards expected of the service supplier. The successful contractor(s) will have a mandatory requirement to meet, as a minimum, the current agency/departmental service standards and any changes which occur to those standards during the life of the contract.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column 75, if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance sent to the private companies shortlisted to run the Benefits Agency medical services. [16495]

Mr. Burt: The information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements he proposes to make for independent inspection of the quality standards to be operated by the private companies running the Benefits Agency medical services. [16499]

Mr. Burt: The post contract management arrangements set in place by the Department will allow for the involvement of a medical surveillance group which will comprise external experts and acknowledged specialists. The group will participate in monitoring the quality of the medical service provided.

In addition, the successful contractor(s) will have a mandatory contractual requirement to allow the National Audit Office appropriate access to it(s) records.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Computer Systems (Millennium)

21. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the awareness of business of the millennium compliance of computer systems. [15043]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Those organisations responding to PA Consulting's recent survey appear to have an increased level of awareness of the problem among their senior managers, now at 93 per cent., but only 65 per cent. have carried out a partial audit of their systems and the proportion having completed their audit is 9 per cent.

Firms (South-east)

22. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many firms are located in the south-east region. [15044]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The south-east—excluding London—had 238,618 VAT-based enterprises at the end of 1995 as compared with 239,763 at the end of 1994 and 239,838 for 1993.

Business Links (Norfolk)

23. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on business links in Norfolk. [15045]

Mr. Page: Business Link Norfolk and Waveney opened in November 1995 with a hub in Norwich and satellites in King's Lynn and Lowestoft and it has made significant progress in serving the local community. Since November 1995, the BL has handled nearly 20,000 inquiries and its personal business advisers are helping nearly 300 businesses.

Business Support (Rural Areas)

24. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement regarding business support in rural areas. [15046]

Mr. Page: Business support in both rural and urban areas is available through the network of business links in England and equivalent organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Telecommunication Services (Suppliers)

26. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the diversity of suppliers of telecommunication services. [15048]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government's policy of progressive liberalisation has led to substantial and growing level of competition in the provision of telecommunications infrastructure, and increased innovation in telecommunication services. As well as having a greater choice than ever before, consumers are also benefiting from better quality of service and lower prices.

Deregulation

27. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new initiatives he has in respect of deregulation. [15049]

Mr. Page: My Department is taking a number of new initiatives. For example, we have recently laid two deregulation orders, bringing the total to 10. Seven of these orders have already become law. We have a further six orders in the pipeline and will continue to bring other candidates forward when we can.

We are striving to remove unnecessary burdens on business through a review of business licences. Consultation is under way on proposals designed to reduce the number of classes of radiocommunication licence from 50 to around 35.

We have four consultation exercises under way on measures which will ease burdens on business. A further 10 such consultations are complete and the results are being considered.

When considering deregulation, it is vital to listen to business. Last year, therefore, I wrote to 130 major trade associations for their views on further measures DTI should take. Over 50 per cent. responded and we are now considering the responses in detail.

Social Chapter

28. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals there are for future legislation

under the social chapter; and what assessment he has made of the impact which this legislation would have on businesses in the United Kingdom. [15050]

Mr. Page: Issues under discussion include rights for part-time and temporary workers, information and consultation in companies at national level and the reversal of the burden of proof in sex discrimination cases. The Commission is considering future action in other areas, including individual dismissals and sick pay. All these measures would be likely to impose damaging, job-destroying burdens on business if we gave up our opt-out from the social chapter.

Research and Development (Aerospace)

29. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received about Government assistance for research and development in the British aerospace industry. [15051]

Mr. Greg Knight: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, I and other ministerial colleagues have received representations in recent months in the form of meetings with the Society of British Aerospace Companies and individual aerospace companies, and letters from Members of Parliament and from aerospace companies.

Petrol Pricing

30. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last discussed petrol pricing with the Office of Fair Trading; and if he will make a statement. [15053]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Neither I nor my current ministerial colleagues have discussed petrol pricing with the Director General of Fair Trading. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Energy set out the Government's position on petrol retailing to the Trade and Industry Select Committee last year.

Bilateral Trade

31. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the prospects for bilateral trade and capital investment between *(a)* the UK and the USA and *(b)* the UK and Australia; and if he will make a statement. [15054]

Mr. Lang: The prospects for bilateral trade and capital investment between the United Kingdom and both overseas markets are excellent. Exports of goods to the United States reached £19.8 billion in 1996 and to Australia £2.5 billion.

The bilateral investment position is very healthy. The United Kingdom and the United States are each the largest direct investor in the other. Australia is the United Kingdom's third largest destination for outward investment and Australia is one of the top five direct investors in the United Kingdom.

European Directives (Social Chapter)

32. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many European directives have been agreed under the social chapter to date. [15055]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Two directives have so far been adopted under the agreement on social policy.

Inward Investment

33. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on trends in foreign direct investment into the UK in the past decade. [15056]

Mr. Greg Knight: The stock of inward investment in the UK rose from £44.3 billion in 1985 to £144 billion in 1995—the latest year for which comparable figures are available.

This increase reflects the UK's continuing attractions as a business location, including competitive costs, a skilled and adaptable work force, low corporation tax and an established industrial infrastructure. That is why the UK is the market leader in Europe for investment from the US and Asia Pacific.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what value of inward investment has come to the United Kingdom in each of the past three years; from which principal countries; and if he will make a statement. [15276]

Mr. Knight: The value of flow figures for inward investment are only available on a consistent basis up to 1994. The top three sources for 1992–94 were as follows.

Year	*Flows £ million*
1992	
United States	3,748
Germany	1,261
Netherlands	1,135
Total into United Kingdom	8,850
1993	
United States	5,144
Netherlands	1,245
Australia	996
Total into United Kingdom	9,863
1994	
United States	1,873
Netherlands	1,691
France	665
Total into United Kingdom	6,110

Source:
International Direct Investment Statistics Yearbook, 1996, OECD.

Trade Deficit

34. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was *(a)* the deficit in trade in goods in 1995 and *(b)* the total deficit in trade in goods for those months of 1996 for which figures are available. [15057]

Mr. Lang: The deficit in trade in goods in 1995 was £11.6 billion. In the first 11 months of 1996, the deficit was £11.7 billion. Overall, the balance of payments current account is close to balance and at its strongest for a decade.

Post Office

35. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the report on the future of the Post Office recently published by the Communications Workers Union. [15058]

Mr. Page: I understand that the Communications Workers Union report on the future of the Post Office was published only on 17 February and neither my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade nor I have yet had an opportunity to study it.

Business Links (Sheffield)

36. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on business links in Sheffield. [15059]

Mr. Page: The business link is now in its second year of operation and, together with its partner organisations, continues to provide valuable support services to the business community in Sheffield.

It has dealt with over 6,000 inquiries since opening. Among its staff, it has three personal business advisers and three specialist counsellors advising on exports, design and finance.

Public Sector Research Establishments

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Government's prior options review of public sector research establishments. [15047]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced the completion of the 1996 programme of prior options reviews on 29 January 1997. The results are designed to ensure that the bodies are managed as efficiently as possible while ensuring a sound scientific base for the future.

Departmental Policies (Bournemouth)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the effect of his Department's policies on the residents of Bournemouth since 1992, with special reference to the effects of changes in the resources provided in real terms. [14946]

Mr. Lang: Bournemouth has benefited from the increased competitiveness of British industry since 1992, which has been brought by maintaining a stable economy, with low burdens on business and a flexible labour market.

Since December 1992, unemployment in Bournemouth has fallen by 44 per cent.—around 8 per cent. more than the national average.

Business Links, Taunton

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment he has made of the financial reports of business links in Taunton, Somerset; and if he will make a statement; [14863]

(2) what action he is currently taking in respect of business links in Taunton, Somerset; and if he will make a statement. [14864]

Mr. Lang *[holding answers 10 February 1997]:* My officials monitor all 89 business links on a regular basis to ensure that public funds are used for the purposes for which they are intended. Where there are particular concerns, my officials will address them with the business link concerned.

There is currently an audit being undertaken at Business Link Somerset and officials are also discussing some monitoring issues with them.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Dover: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on gross domestic product per head in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. [11787]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 20 January 1997]:* In 1995, gross domestic product per head in the UK grew by just over 2 per cent. in real terms, compared with just over 1 per cent. in the OECD as a whole.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of which sectors of the economy private employment agencies primarily operate in. [16473]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The labour force survey of spring 1996 shows that, of people who describe themselves as agency temps, nearly a third are in banking, finance or business services, a quarter are in manufacturing, over a tenth are in public administration, education and health.

Engineering Skills and Training

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the extent of mismatch in skills and training in the United Kingdom engineering sector; and if he will make a statement. [16115]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* My Department has drawn on a large number of studies to determine the strategic requirements of British business for engineering skills. It has also had first-hand input from senior representatives of business and industry who were members of the action for engineering steering group and task forces.

Action for engineering brought together, in an action-oriented forum, employers and training providers to better and meet the skill requirements of industry and commerce. The majority of projects implemented and developed for implementation under action for engineering will address skills shortages through action on the selection, education, training and development of professional engineers and technicians. Outputs from the initiative include: a joint venture company, Setnet, which provides a single point of contact for advice to teachers and industry on school-industry links and curriculum support; better co-ordination of efforts to encourage more of our most able young people to consider engineering as a career, the publication and dissemination of best practice guides on the recruitment and development of technicians and on making better use of engineers; the launch of a training challenge for engineering; and the establishment

of a master of engineering in business degree aimed at improving the breadth of skills of engineers in, and destined for, the boardroom.

At the postgraduate level, the research councils are responsible for providing support to help to meet the country's needs, and they are in regular contact with industry and other research users on issues of quantity and quality of supply, in order to develop initiatives such as the engineering doctorate, the integrated graduate development scheme and the research masters. The foresight programme, run by the Office of Science and Technology, is providing further valuable information on skills needs in engineering and other disciplines.

University Research (Funding)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has in respect of funding for capital equipment for university research; and if he will make a statement. [15378]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* There is to be second round of the joint research equipment initiative involving the research councils, funding councils and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland. In last year's initiative, public funds of around £25 million were matched by funds from industry and other sponsors to yield a total sum for university equipment of £50 million, with 175 projects supported in over 50 institutions.

The details of the second round are currently being finalised, but the aim again is to provide some £50 million for equipment in 1997–98 with the help of industry and other sponsors.

Civil Aviation (Research)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what projects are currently being funded from CARAD—the civil aviation research and technology programme. [15856]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* I regret that the information requested cannot be provided. Some of the projects are supported jointly with the Ministry of Defence and are classified. Release could cause harm in terms of the defence, security and commercial confidence exemptions in the code of practice on access to government information, and would inform competitors about detailed areas of research supported, to the potentially serious detriment of the national research effort. The other projects are carried out by companies whose permission would be required to breach commercial confidentiality. This could be obtained for all projects only at disproportionate cost and would take considerable time. Some projects have been the subject of press publicity. Copies of press releases issued by the Department have been placed in the Library of the House and I have arranged for a copy of the latest CARAD annual report to be placed there.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total expenditure under the CARAD programme in each of the past five years. [15853]

Mr. Knight *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* Total expenditure under the CARAD programme in each of the five years financial years 1991–92 to 1995–96 is tabulated below.

£ million

	Financial year				
	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Gross	25.6	26.4	23.2	23.9	24.7
Receipts[1]	–0.2	–0.1	–0.2	–0.5	–0.2
Nett	25.4	26.3	23.0	23.4	24.5

[1] Residual levies on pre-CARAD projects, and VAT recoveries.

Albania

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to prevent *(a)* British citizens, *(b)* British firms and *(c)* British-sponsored firms or consultancies from becoming involved in Albanian pyramid selling. [16412]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government cannot prevent people making unwise decisions in other countries. However, the Government have acted vigorously to inform people of the risks of money circulation schemes and to prevent such schemes gaining hold in the United Kingdom. In the past three years, we have successfully applied to the court to wind up over 20 companies where this appears justified in the public interest. We have supported the enactment of the Trading Schemes Act 1996 which brings money circulation schemes within the controls of the Fair Trading Act 1973. We have also made related regulations requiring basic good trading practice in the running of trading schemes.

Industry Acts Payments (Corby)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total amount paid under the Industry Acts and subsequent legislation to companies in the Corby area in each year since 1980. [15730]

Mr. Greg Knight: Records showing the total amount paid to companies in the Corby travel-to-work area under sections 7 and 8 of the Industrial Development Act (1982), by calender year, for the period 1983 to 1996 are as follows:

Year	*(£000's)*
1983	840
1984	3,037
1985	5,611
1986	2,925
1987	6,561
1988	5,262
1989	7,210
1990	10,404
1991	3,322
1992	1,339
1993	1,991
1994	2,964
1995	669
1996	1,047
Total	53,182

There are no computerised records for the years 1980 to 1982, and the information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Waste Recycling

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many aluminium can recycling sites there were in the United Kingdom at the latest available date; and how many were located at *(a)* supermarkets, *(b)* local authority aluminium can banks, *(c)* local authority drinks can banks and *(d)* other facilities. [16202]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* In 1994, there were 4,800 aluminium can collection points in the UK. Reliable data relating to their precise location are not yet available.

Source: Aluminium Can Recycling Association.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the capacity in the United Kingdom for recycling *(a)* glass, *(b)* plastics, *(c)* steel cans, *(d)* aluminium cans, *(e)* paper and card, *(f)* batteries, *(g)* tyres, *(h)* vehicles and (i) electrical and electronic equipment, at the latest available date. [16199]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* Estimated theoretical capacities for post-consumer materials recycling are as follows:

	Tonnes
(a)	900,000
(b)	>112,500
(c)	240,000
(d)	120,000
(e)	>4,000,000
(f)	>100,000
(g)	>200,000
(h)	>975,000
(i)	>400,000

Utilisation of these capacities depends upon a number of technical, logistical and commercial factors. Capacity also exists for recovering energy from some of these materials.

Sources: recycling advisory unit and industry data.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the tonnage of *(a)* glass, *(b)* plastics, *(c)* steel cans, *(d)* aluminium cans, *(e)* paper and card, *(f)* batteries, *(g)* tyres, *(h)* vehicles and *(i)* electrical and electronic equipment, recycled in the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available. [16200]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* Tonnages of post-consumer products recycled in 1995 were:

	Tonnes
(a)	501,000
(b)	112,500
(c)	80,000
(d)	30,000
(e)	4,000,000
(f)	100,000
(g)	200,000
(h)	975,000
(i)	300,000[1]

[1] Estimate, for "white goods".

Sources: recycling advisory unit and industry data.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the recycling rate for *(a)* glass, *(b)* plastics, *(c)* steel cans, *(d)* aluminium cans, *(e)* paper and card, *(f)* batteries, *(g)* tyres, *(h)* vehicles and (i) electrical and electronic equipment, in the United Kingdom at the latest available date. [16201]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* Recycling rates in 1995 for post-consumer waste products were:

	Per cent.
(a)	26.5
(b)	5.5
(c)	16.0
(d)	28.0
(e)	35.0
(f)	(car batteries) 90.0
(g)	51.0
(h)	75.0
(i)	(white goods) 75.0

Sources: recycling advisory unit and industry data.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the *(a)* number of aluminium cans produced and consumed, *(b)* consumption of aluminium cans in tonnes, *(c)* number of aluminium can banks, *(d)* number of aluminium cans collected, *(e)* number of tonnes of aluminium cans collected and *(f)* aluminium can recycling rate in (i) 1995 and (ii) 1996 in the United Kingdom. [16203]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* The information is as follows:

	1995	*1996*
(a)	7.0 billion produced 6.8 billion consumed	5.3 billion produced 5.1 billion consumed
(b)	109,000 tonnes	84,000 tonnes
(c)	4,8000	Data not yet available
(d)	1.9 billion	Data not yet available
(e)	30,000 tonnes	Data not yet available
(f)	28 per cent	Data not yet available

Source: Aluminium Can Recycling Association.

Waste Disposal at Sea

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what are his Department's current proposals for disposal at sea of *(a)* bulky radioactive wastes and *(b)* redundant oil or gas installations; [15652]

(2) what is his Department's role in respect of the disposal of redundant oil and gas installations at sea; and if he will list the current proposals for such disposal under consideration by his Department. [15654]

Mr. Page: Any proposals for the removal and disposal of disused offshore oil and gas installations are subject to the approval of the Secretary of State under the terms of the Petroleum Act 1987. Proposals involving disposal at

sea also require approval under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in English and Welsh waters or from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in Scottish waters. My Department has no proposals for sea disposal under consideration at the present time.

Questions relating to the disposal of radioactive wastes are a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment, and the Secretary of States for Scotland and for Wales.

Telecommunications

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the outcome of the World Trade Organisation talks on telecommunications; and if he will make a statement. [17104]

Mr. Lang: I very much welcome this major success, both for the World Trade Organisation as a promoter of free trade worldwide, and for the United Kingdom, particularly for telecommunications operators, manufacturers and users. The United Kingdom was an active participant in the talks, chairing them throughout the nearly three years they took to complete. My hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology attended earlier EU Telecoms Ministers Council Meetings and the final stages of the discussions last week.

This agreement, which covers 69 countries and over 91 per cent. of the £400 billion world market for telecommunications will create an enormous boost for operators in the United Kingdom, the most open and competitive market for telecommunications in the world, by offering them access to a large number of markets worldwide, and reinforcing the United Kingdom's position as a global telecommunications hub. It will also give added impetus to the spread of liberalisation, which the United Kingdom has pioneered since the early 1980s, within a guaranteed framework of multilateral, enforceable rules. The expected boost to investment, as more countries open their markets to competition, means new orders for equipment and, equally important, software and systems management from which our manufacturers are well placed to benefit. Some estimates point to an additional £20 billion increase in UK telecoms revenues by 2010.

To British consumers, it will mean cheaper telephone charges, as competition in other markets has the same effect as it has had here in bringing charges closer to cost, and British operators pass these on to consumers here. I expect this to bring us closer to the day when ringing New York will cost little more than ringing another town in Britain. This also holds major benefits for the British economy as a whole. World-wide, industry and consumers spend more on telecommunications than on oil products. Low telecommunications charges have already made the United Kingdom an attractive location for people to do business and invest—even lower charges will reinforce this.

Exports (Manufactured Goods)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on trends since the end of the third quarter of 1996 in respect of United Kingdom exports of manufactured goods, with particular reference to *(a)* electronic equipment, *(b)* motor parts and components and *(c)* machine tools. [15178]

Mr. Greg Knight: Information on trade with other EU countries to October 1996 is published by HM Customs and Excise in business monitor MM20A. Information on trade with non-EU members to November 1996 is published in business monitor MM20. There is insufficient data since the end of Q3 1996 to assess trends.

Export Credits Guarantee Department (Debt)

Ms Short: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the debt currently owed to the Export Credits Guarantee Department, indicating *(a)* arrears and current maturities that have rescheduled, *(b)* arrears and current maturities that have not been rescheduled and *(c)* future maturities that have not yet fallen due for payment. [16206]

Mr. Nelson: At the close of ECGD's last financial year on 31 March 1996 the debt currently owed to the Department amounted to £6,721.3 million. Rescheduled amounts totalled £4,819.1 million and unrescheduled amounts £1,902.2 million.

Total future maturities which have not yet fallen due for payment amounted to £17,720.3 million.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Sector Pension Schemes

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the Northern Ireland public sector pension schemes with their *(a)* current membership, *(b)* last annual income from employer and employee contributions, *(c)* annual expenditure in payments of benefit and *(d)* administration costs. [14839]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is listed:

Pension scheme	*Current membership*	*Last annual employer (£000s)*[1]	*Income from employee (£000s)*[1]	*Annual payments in benefits (£000s) per annum*[1]	*Administration costs (£000s) per annum*[1]
Health and personal social services (HPSS) superannuation scheme	36,435	21,380	32,235	85,439	680
Belfast corporation transport department	396	nil	nil	1,100	13
Northern Ireland firemen's pension scheme	1,395	nil	1,964	4,198	35
Northern Ireland local government officers superannuation scheme	27,109	8,340	18,705	43,855	927
Ulster transport authority	216	nil	nil	408	5
Teachers superannuation scheme	35,000[2]	40,200	30,727	94,754	450

Pension scheme	Current membership	Last annual employer (£000s)[1]	Income from employee (£000s)[1]	Annual payments in benefits (£000s) per annum[1]	Administration costs (£000s) per annum[1]
Principal civil service pension scheme (Northern Ireland)	29,877	74,417	9,289	84,246	566
Police authority pension scheme	12,100	nil	30,580	44,140	300

[1] All monetary figures as at 31 March 1996.
[2] Approximately.

Civil Service

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the staffing and overtime costs of the recent special redundancy and early retirement exercise in the Northern Ireland civil service; how many civil servants of which grade and from which department were given payments; what was the average gratuity and pension awarded; and how many posts were declared redundant. [15726]

Sir John Wheeler: Not all of the releases planned under the 1996–97 redundancy and early retirement schemes have yet been processed; therefore the information given relates only to the period 1 April 1996 to 31 January 1997. The number of releases by department and grade are shown in the table.

Most of the administration costs of the exercise have been subsumed within the normal running costs. The staffing costs therefore relate only to those additional costs which it has been possible to ascertain at other than disproportionate cost.

The average gratuity includes scheme lump sum, enhanced lump sum, compensation lump sum and commuted lump sum while the average pension is the average annual amount to be paid until the various officers reach the normal retiring age.

	Cost/figures
Staff costs	£85,000.00
Overtime costs	£39,039.00
Number of redundancy/early retirement cases processed	311
Average gratuity	£50,362.55
Average pension payment (annual amount)	£2,131.26
Number of posts declared redundant (anticipated in period 1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997)	557

Agri-environment Schemes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding his Department has allocated in the current year for the operation of agri-environment schemes; and if he will make a statement on the operation of the schemes. [15210]

Mr. Ancram: Total funding for the operation of agri-environment schemes in Northern Ireland is £5.96 million. Of this, £5,092 million is allocated for payment to farmers, £100,000 for monitoring and evaluation costs and £768,000 in respect of operational costs.

The agri-environment schemes are subject to periodic review. Approval has recently been received from the EC to certain minor changes on payment rates and other provisions of the environmentally sensitive area schemes which resulted from a review in 1996. The changes will be introduced shortly. A fundamental review will be carried out in 1998. The organic aid scheme is presently under review.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to produce a rural White Paper for Northern Ireland. [17106]

Mr. Moss: There are no plans at present to produce a rural White Paper for Northern Ireland. Apart from the range of Government policies covering Northern Ireland as a whole, rural areas are specifically addressed by some 16 existing and policy statements. In addition, there is a series of financial programmes targeted at the economic and social revitalisation of the most disadvantaged rural areas in Northern Ireland through community projects and partnerships with local people. A recently published report commissioned by the Department of Agriculture highlighted the considerable success of the rural development programme since its launch in 1991 and it continues to serve as an effective instrument in tackling the needs of rural areas in Northern Ireland.

Existing Government policies and programmes for rural areas of Northern Ireland therefore compare very favourably with those in other parts of the UK. My Department will continue to keep abreast of policy developments affecting rural areas on the mainland and, where appropriate, will consider their adoption in Northern Ireland.

Department of Health and Social Security Services (Maladministration)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement regarding the DHSS arrangements for considering financial redress where maladministration has occurred. [17107]

Mr. Moss: The Department of Health and Social Services is committed to making its services more responsive to the needs of its customers, operating financial redress where appropriate. Since 1977, the Department has operated arrangements whereby financial redress can be made to a customer who has suffered a financial loss through maladministration. These arrangements mirror those operated by the Department of Social Security. While the arrangements have been updated periodically since then, a major review, covering

the whole of the United Kingdom, has recently been completed. The review, which took account of the principles contained in the Office of Public Service and Treasury guidance and concerns raised by the GB Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the parliamentary ombudsman for Northern Ireland, has resulted in the production of a revised set of arrangements.

The revised arrangements provide the basis for a consistent approach to complaints across agencies and offer a more sympathetic attitude to cases where official error has occurred, but no financial loss has been experienced. They also ensure more equitable treatment in the consideration of compensation payments when moneys due are unnecessarily delayed. In line with the remainder of the United Kingdom, the revised arrangements are effective from 1 January 1997. A copy of "Financial Redress for Maladministration",—DHSS(NI), which provides detailed guidance will be placed in the Library.

Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what targets have been set for the Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency during 1997–98. [17108]

Mr. Moss: For 1997–98, the following targets have been set:

	Target
Vehicle test appointments	21 days average waiting time
Driving test appointments	38 days average waiting time
Productivity (vehicle testing)	18.5 units per man per day
Productivity (driver testing)	7.98 units per man per day
Faulty inspections	Faulty inspections not to exceed 0.01 per cent. of tests conducted
Level of complaints about booking arrangements	Less than 0.20 per cent. of applications received
Level of complaints about the conduct of tests	Less than 0.20 per cent. of applications received
Level of customer satisfaction with booking arrangements	At least 85 per cent. plus or minus 2 per cent. within the range of sampling error
Level of customer satisfaction with test procedures	At least 92 per cent. plus or minus 2 per cent. within the range of sampling error
Number of compensation payments for cancelled tests	Less than 0.2 per cent. of applications received

WALES

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of cases of abuse of mentally ill people in community care in Wales which *(a)* are currently under investigation and *(b)* have been reported in each of the last five years; of those investigated, how many and what percentage have resulted in (i) prosecution and (ii) conviction; and if he will make a statement. [12951]

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 27 January 1997]:* The Welsh Office has made no such estimate.

Hospital Beds

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each year since 1979 the numbers of *(a)* registered beds and *(b)* occupied beds in (i) registered private hospitals or clinics, (ii) registered private nursing homes and (iii) all registered establishments in Wales, showing separately those which were for (1) acute specialties, (2) mental illness, (3) people with learning difficulties, (4) people with physical disabilities, (5) maternity and (6) other purposes. [14545]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information on registered beds is given in the following table. Information on occupied beds is not collected centrally and no information on bed numbers is available before 1982.

Private hospitals and nursing homes

	Category of bed							
	Acute[1]	*Mental illness*	*Mental handicap*	*Physical disabilities*	*Maternity*	*Elderly: General*[2]	*Other*[3]	*Total*
Private hospitals at 31 December								
1982	236	18	—	—	1	—	—	255
1983	227	18	—	—	1	—	—	246
1984	227	18	—	—	1	—	—	246
1985	227	18	—	—	1	—	—	246
1986	193	18	—	—	1	—	—	212
1987	196	18	—	—	1	—	—	215
at 31 March								
1989	210	18	—	—	—	—	—	228
1990	250	18	—	—	—	—	—	268
1991	246	18	—	—	—	—	—	264
1992	243	18	—	—	—	—	12	273
1993	239	18	—	—	—	—	12	269
1994	230	5	—	—	—	—	10	245
1995	251	67	—	—	—	—	—	318
Private nursing homes at 31 December								
1982	68	25	5	—	24	862	—	984
1983	98	54	—	—	24	992	—	1,168
1984	88	50	—	—	24	1,171	—	1,333
1985	79	71	—	—	24	1,727	—	1,901
1986	28	203	—	—	24	2,532	—	2,787
1987	291	307	9	—	—	3,398	—	4,005

Private hospitals and nursing homes

	Category of bed							
	Acute[1]	*Mental illness*	*Mental handicap*	*Physical disabilities*	*Maternity*	*Elderly: General*[2]	*Other*[3]	*Total*
at 31 March								
1989	620	592	9	—	—	4,745	—	5,966
1990	357	874	37	—	—	6,491	—	7,759
1991	51	1,197	24	—	—	8,384	—	9,656
1992	65	1,280	162	409	—	8,808	309	11,033
1993	3	1,605	63	616	—	9,607	228	12,122
1994	67	1,816	24	354	—	10,280	165	12,706
1995	53	1,974	27	645	—	10,429	76	13,204
Private hospitals and nursing homes at 31 December								
1982	304	43	5	—	25	862	—	1,239
1983	325	72	—	—	25	992	—	1,414
1984	315	68	—	—	25	1,171	—	1,579
1985	306	89	—	—	25	1,727	—	2,147
1986	221	221	—	—	25	2,532	—	2,999
1987	487	325	9	—	1	3,398	—	4,220
at 31 March								
1989	830	610	9	—	—	4,745	—	6,194
1990	607	892	37	—	—	6,491	—	8,027
1991	297	1,215	24	—	—	8,384	—	9,920
1992	308	1,298	162	409	—	8,808	321	11,306
1993	242	1,623	63	616	—	9,607	240	12,391
1994	297	1,821	24	354	—	10,280	175	12,951
1995	304	2,041	27	645	—	10,429	76	13,522

[1] Includes other general beds.
[2] General elderly beds not classified as acute.
[3] Terminal illness.

Beef Export Ban

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact on *(a)* farmers' incomes and *(b)* the economy of Wales of the European ban on UK beef exports. [15479]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Total income from farming in Wales is estimated to have fallen by 4.4 per cent. in 1996. This is due to a range of factors, including BSE. Output from the cattle sector in Wales is estimated to have fallen by just under 23 per cent. in 1996. However, this reduction in output is largely offset by compensation and support measures put in place by the Government. The Department is co-sponsoring an independent study to provide a comprehensive assessment of the economic impact of BSE.

Electoral Register

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total number of electors for each of the new parliamentary constituencies in Wales for the 1997–98 register of electors effective from 16 February. [16214]

Mr. Hague: The Office for National Statistics is preparing a monitor detailing numbers of electors on the 1997 electoral register for each of the new parliamentary constituencies. This will be published by early April 1997 and a copy will be placed in the Library on the day of publication.

The numbers of electors on the 1996 electoral register for the new parliamentary constituencies in the United Kingdom were published in July 1996 by ONS in Monitor EL 96/2, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mink Fur Farms

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many mink fur farms there are in Wales by county. [16410]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: There are no mink fur farms in Wales.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which (a) and (b) have attended, indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16578]

Mr. Hague: Nil.

Agri-environment Schemes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funding his Department has allocated in the current year for the operation of agri-environment schemes; and if he will make a statement on the operation of the schemes. [15208]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Current provision for 1996–97 is £3.32 million. I anticipate that running and monitoring costs for 1996–97 will be £1.98 million and £0.85 million respectively.

SCOTLAND

NHS Salaries and Wages

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list NHS salaries and wages costs for *(a)* general and senior manager, *(b)* nurses and midwives and *(c)* administrative and clerical staff for the financial years (i) 1994–95 and (ii) 1995–96. [14575]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The annual accounts of the health boards and NHS trusts do not detail separately salaries and wages for general and senior managers. This information is included in the costs of administrative and clerical staff as detailed in the table.

£ thousand

	1994–95	*1995–96*
Nurses and midwives	949,697	939,844
Administrative and clerical staff	251,328	265,516

The salaries and wages of student nurses are included in the figure 1994–95 but not 1995–96 as a result of the introduction of Project 2000.

Basking Sharks

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of *(a)* the depletion rate of basking sharks over the past five years and *(b)* the size of the current population around the coastline and islands; and if he will make a statement. [14667]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 12 February 1997]:* No estimates are currently available due in part to the basking shark's erratic and highly variable appearances off Scotland's coasts. Scottish Natural Heritage has examined the feasibility of monitoring the distribution and movement of this species and is considering the best way of taking forward research.

LAW Mining

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the actions taken by the Lanarkshire mining company, LAW Mining, in respect of petitioners against its planning applications to develop opencast mining; and if he will make a statement. [15977]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has received no representations about the reported action by LAW mining in respect of petitioners against its planning application. Clearly, it can sometimes be useful for a planning authority in preparing for decision making to take into account the views of applicants, objectors or consultees on representations made by other parties. However, should any party take it upon itself to make an inquiry about any such representation it should, of course, be undertaken in a lawful manner.

Scottish Prison Service

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the properties owned by the Scottish Prison Service in *(a)* Clydesdale, *(b)* Lanarkshire and *(c)* Scotland; and if he will list the total valuations in each category; [15902]

(2) if it is Government policy to sell off Scottish Prison Service property to the highest bidder; what account is taken of the willingness of the sitting tenants to buy; and if he will make a statement; [15899]

(3) what discount is allowed to Scottish prison officers living in tied accommodation when buying their homes; [15903]

(4) what consultation there was with sitting tenants, renting property owned by the Scottish Prison Service, concerning the sell-off of houses and garages. [15900]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the questions relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Jimmy Hood, dated 19 February 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your questions about properties owned by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) and various associated matters relating to disposal procedures.

You asked for information abut properties owned by the SPS in specific parts of Scotland, and for the country as a whole. This information is set out in the table attached. The valuation figures have been provided by the relevant District Valuers.

You also asked about the policy in relation to selling property to the highest bidder. Government policy is that assets, not required for operational purposes, should be disposed of at the best price possible, with due regard to any special factors, such as the discount sales scheme which operates in relation to staff quarters. The extent of discounts allowed was the subject of one of your further questions. The discount scheme enjoyed by prison officers is equivalent to that operated by local authorities under the "Right to Buy" legislation. Prison officers do not have a statutory right to buy, but, unless there are any limitations on security grounds relating to the sale of the property, officers may purchase quarters at discounts which range from 32 per cent. to 60 per cent. for a house, and 44 per cent. for a flat, depending upon length of tenure.

You also asked about what consultation there was with sitting tenants, renting property owned by the SPS, concerning the sell-off of houses and garages. When the discounted sales scheme was introduced in 1981, all SPS staff in rented quarters were advised of the conditions under which they were eligible to purchase, and the level of discounts they would receive. The terms of the discount scheme had been agreed with the relevant trade unions. Since then, staff who have continued to occupy SPS quarters have been reminded from time to time of the opportunity to purchase. Quarters are disposed of only to willing tenants who submit an application to purchase.

As regards garages, where these are occupied by SPS staff who are also renting or have purchased an SPS quarter, tenancies would continue until such time as the tenant either wished to purchase, gave up the garage voluntarily or left the Service. In certain cases, where there has been no interest by SPS staff in renting garages, and no internal or external interest in purchase, vacant garages have been rented to private tenants. In these circumstances, if the siting tenant later wished to purchase, the sale would normally take place at a price determined by the District Valuer. Given the small sums of money involved, it has not been the practice to seek then to advertise the property in an attempt to obtain a higher price. If an outside party expressed an interest in purchasing a garage in private tenancy then, in fairness to the sitting tenant, he/she would be offered first refusal, either at the District Valuer's sale price, or at the amount offered by the other party, whichever was the higher.

Scottish Prison Service Property[1]

Area	Total value £	Area sub total £
Clydesdale Constituency		
2 garages (Hunters Way, Blackwood)	680	680
Lanarkshire (North and South)		
2 houses (Hamilton Drive, Dungavel)	75,000	
7 garages (Hamilton Drive, Dungavel)	2,310	
4 houses (The Crescent, Longriggend)	104,000	
13 garages (The Crescent, Longriggend)	4,030	
1 staff club (at Longriggend Remand Institution)	50,000	
10 houses (Burns Place, Shotts)	316,000	
2 houses (Byron Road, Shotts)	93,500	
14 garages (Burns Place, Shotts)	4,620	
9 garages (Byron Road, Shotts)	2,970	652,430
Aberdeenshire		
1 house (Ashgrove Place, Peterhead)	37,000	
1 house (Bell Avenue)	37,500	
1 house (Blackhill Crescent, Peterhead)	40,000	
1 house (MacKenzie Court, Peterhead)	40,000	
1 house (Seaview Gardens, Peterhead)	38,000	
14 garages (Brucklay Court, Peterhead)	35,000	
21 garages (North Site, Peterhead)	52,500	
29 garages (South Site, Peterhead)	72,500	
1 staff club (at Peterhead Prison)	80,000	432,500
Angus		
1 house (Woodlands Avenue)	35,500	
2 garages (Woodlands Avenue)	400	
1 staff club (at Noranside Prison)	25,000	60,900
Clackmannanshire		
1 house (The Cleaves, Glenochil)	54,000	
9 garages (Glenochil Village)	13,500	
30 garages (Woodlea Park, Sauchi, Alloa)	60,000	
1 staff club (at Glenochil YOI and Prison)	49,000	176,500
Dumfries and Galloway		
1 house (Ashfield Drive, Dumfries)	38,000	
1 house (Cree Cottage, Penninghame)	43,000	81,000
East Dunbartonshire		
1 house (Meadowburn, Bishopbriggs)	58,000	58,000
Edinburgh, City of		
1 house (Calder Road, Edinburgh)	62,500	
33 garages (Longstone Gardens, Edinburgh)	82,500	
1 staff club (at Edinburgh Prison)	200,000	345,000
Falkirk		
4 houses (Blairlodge Avenue, Brightons)	193,000	
1 house (Polwarth Avenue, Brightons)	46,000	
1 staff club (at Polmont YOI)	90,000	329,000
Glasgow, City of		
6 houses (Lethamhill Road, Glasgow)	192,000	
21 garages (Lethamhill Road, Glasgow)	10,500	
1 staff club (at Barlinnie Prison)	180,000	382,500
Highland		
1 garage (Old Edinburgh Road, Inverness)	2,750	2,750
Perth and Kinross		
2 houses (The Avenue, Castle Huntly)	84,000	
10 garages (Castle Grove, Castle Huntly)	4,500	
1 staff club (at Castle Huntly Prison)	30,000	
17 garages (Mansion Crescent, Perth)	8,500	
1 staff club (at Perth Prison)	56,000	183,000

Scottish Prison Service Property[1]

Area	Total value £	Area sub total £
Stirling		
6 houses (Cornton Cottages, Bridge of Allan)	292,000	
4 garages (Castle Vale, Bridge of Allan)	6,000	298,000
West Lothian		
1 storage depot (Fauldhouse)	800,000	800,000
Overall Total		3,802,260

[1] Excluding prison establishments themselves.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what training is available to staff within the Scottish Prison Service's estates department in public relations and how to communicate with the general public, and if he will make a statement; [15904]

(2) how many managers are employed within the Scottish Prison Service's estates department; and what are their grades and salaries; [15905]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the questions relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked the chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Jimmy Hood, dated 19 February 1997:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your questions about Scottish Prison Service (SPS) Estate Department staff.

You asked about the numbers, grades (expressed in terms of pay bands) and salaries of managers employed with the SPS's Estate Department. The information, relating to the Estates Directorate within the SPS's Headquarters in Edinburgh, is as follows:—

Head of Estates Directorate

1 x Band H @ £40k

Branch Heads

1 x Band H @ £35k

2 x Band G @ £30k

There are no specific courses in "public relations and how to communicate with the general public". Normally mangers and their staff receive training in building, professional and construction matters, and also in administration-related topics, reflecting the range of duties they carry out. Contact with the public in such areas is minimal. It is however my view that all public servants where they do come into contact with the public, should deal with them in a polite, courteous and professional manner. Where a development need is identified, training can be provided.

Electoral Register

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number of electors for each of the new parliamentary constituencies in Scotland for the 1997–98 register of electors effective from 16 February. [16209]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not yet available centrally.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years

for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16183]

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The Scottish Office and its agencies make minimal use of private employment agencies to provide staff with particular skills at short notice. Statistics are not held centrally either on the numbers employed through private employment agencies or on the median costs.

The following tables do, however, give the figures for total expenditure in each of the last three years, along with an estimate of the average length of contract.

Private employment agencies

Name	*Total cost for year (£)*	*Average length of contract (weeks)*
1994		
ASA International		
Clyde Marine		
Hays Accountancy Personnel		
Office Personnel		
Pertemps Caledonian		
	53,787	4.6
1995		
Accountancy Personnel		
Clyde Marine		
Hays Accountancy		
Pertemps Caledonian		
	64,962	17.75
1996		
ASA International		
Clyde Marine		
Hays Accountancy Personnel		
Humber Shipping Services		
Reed Staffing		
Sealife Crewing Services		
Seamariner Ltd.		
Pertemps Caledonian		
	86,893	16.5

Royal Yacht

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the costs incurred by *(a)* Locate in Scotland and *(b)* Scottish Financial Enterprise in the promotional use of the royal yacht in the past seven years. [15626]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The total cost to Locate in Scotland of using the royal yacht for promotional purposes during the past seven years was £23,596.

Scottish Financial Enterprise is a private sector organisation and questions relating to the costs incurred by it in connection with its use of the royal yacht are a matter for it.

Homeless People

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State of Scotland how many homeless people there were in each Scottish constituency in each year between 1992 and 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15892]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The available information relates to local authorities and not to parliamentary constituencies.

Mink Fur Farms

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mink fur farms there are in Scotland by county. [16408]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: There are no mink fur farms in operation in Scotland.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his Department had made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16310]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Department recognises that it has an important part to play in using products which do not contain either hazardous materials or ozone-depleting substances and has had green housekeeping strategies in place since 1992. Within the Scottish Office, core estate goods that contain chlorofluorocarbons in any application are not purchased and the use of ozone-depleting substances has been phased out. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 are fully implemented in the procurement, storage, use, and disposal of chemically based products.

Agri-environment Schemes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total budget for *(a)* environmentally sensitive areas and *(b)* the Scottish countryside premium scheme, over each of the next three years. [15213]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The overall planned provision for the Scottish agri-environment programme is £9.235 million for 1997–98, £13.468 million for 1998–99 and £15.7 million for 1999–2000. This excludes running costs for the schemes, since this information is not collected separately.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding his Department has allocated in the current year for the operation of agri-environment schemes; and if he will make a statement on the operation of the schemes. [15211]

Mr. Robertson: The overall financial provision for the Scottish agri-environment programme for 1996–97 is £9.248 million. This includes monitoring costs for environmentally sensitive areas but excludes running costs for the schemes, since this information is not collected separately.

All aspects of the operation of the schemes are kept under review. Following completion of a programme of biennial reviews, substantial increases in payment rates and ceilings for environmentally sensitive areas were implemented last year. In addition, the new countryside premium scheme, which we plan to launch in the spring, will provide a comprehensive menu of conservation options previously only available to farmers and crofters in environmentally sensitive areas.

Pesca Funding

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the disbursement of Pesca funding to local authorities in Scotland in respect of approved projects; when these funds were received from the EU authorities; when he proposes to distribute the money; if he will list the projects and authorities concerned, indicating the amounts of Pesca funding due; and what are the reasons for delays in that distribution. [15792]

Mr. Kynoch: The Pesca community initiative operates on a UK basis and the Scottish Office receives its share of funds from the European Commission via the Department for Education and Employment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Trade and Industry respectively. The first instalments of all funds were received by November 1996.

Pesca is delivered in eligible areas in Scotland through local Pesca groups—LPGs. The Scottish Office has approved a business plan for each LPG detailing the budget and criteria for selecting individual projects at local level. Each LPG has begun to implement its business plan and approve projects. Detailed lists of projects will be provided in annual reports from the LPGs for collation by the Scottish Office and transmission to the European Commission in June 1997.

The table lists the LPGs, each group's allocation and the lead organisation and telephone number.

The need to establish administrative arrangements which achieved the greatest delegation of responsibility to local areas while ensuring proper accountability delayed the operation of Pesca in Scotland. It is to the credit of all concerned that we now have an acceptable balance. The Scottish sub-programmes are now operating ahead of most of the rest of the UK. By the end of this financial year, the Scottish Office will have disbursed all due Pesca funds.

Pesca (UK programme)—Objective 1 sub-programme

Local Pesca group	*Allocation in MECU (1995–99)*	*Approximate value in £s*	*Lead organisation and telephone number*
1. Argyll	0.676	528,122	Argyll and the Islands Enterprise—01546 602281
2. Caithness and Sutherland	0.860	671,872	Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise—01847 896115
3. Lochaber	0.189	147,655	Locaber Ltd.—01397 874638
4. Orkney	0.286	223,436	Orkney Enterprise—01856 874638
5. Wester Ross	0.218	170,312	Ross and Cromarty Enterprise—01349 853666
6. Shetland	0.442	345,311	Shetland Enterprise—01595 693177
7. Skye and Lochalsh	0.297	232,030	Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise—01478 612841
8. Western Isles	0.608	474,998	Western Isles Enterprise—01851 703703
Total	3.576	2,793,736	
Regional Projects	0.387	302,342	Highlands and Islands Enterprise—01463 234171
Management	0.398	310,936	Highlands and Islands Enterprise—01463 234171
Total	4.361	3,407,014	

Non-objective 1 sub-programme

Local Pesca group	*Allocation in MECU (1995–1999)*	*Allocation in sterling (1995–1999)*	*Lead organisation and telephone number*
1. Grampian	8.149	6,366,374	Aberdeenshire Council—01224 682222
2. Tayside/Fife	1.34	1,046,870	Fife council—01592 414141
3. South West Scotland	1.34	1,046,870	Dumfries and Galloway Council—01387 260070
4. Borders	1.34	1,046,870	Scottish Borders Council—01835 824000
Total	12.169	9,506,983	

Consultants

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent on consultants' reports over the past five years. [16494]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Expenditure over the past five years by the Scottish Office and its associated agencies on external consultants including management consultants has been:

1991–92: £10,836,000

1992–93: £4,370,000

1993–94: £5,383,000

1994–95: £4,079,000

1995–96: £5,440,000

HEALTH

Lariam

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, with dates, the changes made between 1990 and 1997 in the product data sheet issued to patients with the drug Lariam, describing use and possible side-effects; and what were the reasons for the changes. [15193]

Mr. Malone: The changes that have been made to the product information for Lariam—mefloquine—between 1990 and 1997 have been placed in the Library. The reasons for the changes are that new evidence has become available to the marketing authorisation holder and to the Medicines Control Agency. The sources of the

information include suspected adverse reactions received through spontaneous adverse reaction reporting schemes and clinical studies on efficacy or safety of the product.

Copies of data sheets that have been included in the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry data sheet compendium between 1990 and 1996, along with the current data sheet and the patient information leaflets for the same period, have been placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts (Lease Cars)

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of NHS trust chairmen and non-executive directors with lease cars on 31 December *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996. [16242]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the different arrangements applying to *(a)* Crown and *(b)* lease cars provided to members of boards of NHS trusts. [16236]

Mr. Malone: Under the terms of section 24 of the general Whitley council handbook, national health service employers may offer Crown cars to employees where they deem it to be in the interests of the service. The Whitley council scheme does not apply to chairmen and non-executive directors. They may be provided with lease cars when this represents value for money when compared with other methods of funding their travel on NHS business. However, they must make a personal contribution for any private use equivalent to the full amount of the taxable benefit.

NHS Medical Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement on 11 February, *Official Report*, column 156, concerning the size of the current Red Book contract for the delivery of NHS general medical services, what opportunities will be offered by his proposed amendment to the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill *[Lords]* which are not possible under a current Red Book contract. [16023]

Mr. Malone: The National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill will permit those who work in the NHS to shape services to reflect local needs and circumstances rather than work solely to the national terms of service.

Hospitals (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many capital spending projects are *(a)* under way and *(b)* planned at hospitals in Lancashire. [16144]

Mr. Horam: As at 31 December 1996, there were 10 schemes under way in the North West region. A further 10 projects are planned. Details for Lancashire are not available separately.

Abortion

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will embody the British Medical Association guidelines on conscientious objection to abortion in a departmental circular to GPs. [16095]

Mr. Horam: In 1991 the general medical services council of the British Medical Association issued guidance to general practitioners through local medical committees, reminding them of their objections under their terms of service. The guidance remains extant, and GPs who have a conscientious objection to abortion should refer the patient to another doctor as soon as possible.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will direct regional health executives not to employ criteria for NHS abortions which are not provided for in the Abortion Act 1967. [16096]

Mr. Horam: The Abortion Act 1967 as amended sets out the grounds on which abortion may lawfully be carried out. The criteria health authorities use when deciding on the level of abortion services are not covered by the Act.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement of the Abortion Law Reform Association report on "NHS Abortion Services". [16161]

Mr. Horam: The Abortion Law Reform Association report has indicted that where the conditions of the Abortion Act 1967 as amended are met there is an overall national improvement in access to abortion services.

Any specific service issues are a matter for local health authorities and should be brought up with them in the first instance.

Dentists

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists worked in the NHS in the north-west of England *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* in 1979. [16169]

Mr. Malone: The table shows the number of general dental service dentists at 30 September 1979 and 1995 in north-west England.

General Dental Service: number of dentists by family health services authority at 30 September north-west England

	1979	*1995*
North-west England	1,511	2,083
Cheshire	241	319
Liverpool	123	152
St. Helens and Knowsley	75	95
Sefton	77	93
Wirral	89	121
Lancashire	284	442
Bolton	53	79
Bury	43	58
Manchester	136	167
Oldham	42	67
Rochdale	45	58
Salford	49	67
Stockport	91	108

General Dental Service: number of dentists by family health services authority at 30 September north-west England

	1979	*1995*
Tameside	46	73
Trafford	62	87
Wigan	55	97

1. The figures represent the number of dentists (principals) on the family health services authority list and their assistants and vocational trainees.
2. Some dentists have contracts with more than one family health services authority. These dentists have been counted only once.
3. Excludes salaried, hospital, and community dentists.

Hospitals (North-west)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients were treated in hospitals in the north-west in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1979; [16147]

(2) how many patients were treated at hospitals in the north-west in 1979. [16159]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of patients treated is not collected centrally. In-patient activity is recorded in terms of finished consultant episodes. The latest year for which information is available is 1995–96, and the information is contained in "Ordinary and day case admissions: England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Prior to 1988–89, data were collected on a different basis. Information for 1979 is not available in the form requested for the North-west region.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the number employed by the agencies in work for this Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16184]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is shown in the table.

Figures are not available to provide the median cost paid to each agency and the average length of contracts, but agency staff are used only to cover short-term absences.

Agencies used

1994

Stag Services
Accounts Temps
Adecco Alfred Marks
Adia
Badenock and Clarke
Challoner and James
Josephine Sammon
Headway
Kelly
Link Up Group
Manpower
Office Angels
Reed Personnel
Susan Hamilton
Talentmark Ltd.
Task Force Pro Libra
Total numbers: 211
Total costs: £688,655

1995

Accounts Temps
Adecco Alfred Marks
Adia
Badenock and Clarke
Challoner James
Josephine Sammon
Headway
Kelly
Link Up Group
Manpower
Office Angels
Reed Personnel
Susan Hamilton
Talentmark Ltd.
Task Force Pro Libra
Angela Mortimer
Headway Recruitment
Pax Services Ltd.
Premium Employment
The Library Association
The Staff Agency
Total numbers: 345
Total costs: £973,423

1996

Accounts Temps
Adecco Alfred Marks
Adia
Badenock and Clarke
Challoner James
Josephine Sammon
Headway
Kelly
Link Up Group
Manpower
Office Angels
Reed Personnel
Susan Hamilton
Talentmark Ltd.
Task Force Pro Libra
Angela Mortimer
Headway Recruitment
Pax Services Ltd.
Premium Employment
The Library Association
The Staff Agency
Accountancy Addition
Accountancy Solution
Brook St. Bureau

Career Girl
Per Temps
Select Appointments
Total numbers: 265
Total costs: £910,877

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16575]

Mr. Horam: No Ministers or officials from the Department of Health have attended a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee.

National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what organisations have proposed amendments to the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill *[Lords]* to his Department. [15814]

Mr. Malone: The Department has held discussions with a number of organisations, including representatives of primary care professionals, about the provisions of the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill, including discussions about how the Bill might be amended in ways to meet their particular concerns. However, amendments may be proposed only through hon. Members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he has had with *(a)* unions representing medical workers, *(b)* NHS trusts, *(c)* medical insurance companies and *(d)* the British Medical Association regarding the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill *[Lords]*. [15815]

Mr. Malone: The Bill follows wide consultations with all those with an interest in primary care, including national health service trusts, general practitioners, dentists, nurses and other health professionals and their representatives. The range and variety of consultation is outlined in the annex to "Primary Care: The Future", published on 10 June 1996, copies of which are available in the Library.

Discussions about the Bill and its proposals between officials and representatives of the professions are continuing. Officials have had a preliminary meeting with a representative of the Medical Defence Union, at its request, to discuss the arrangements for indemnity under the proposals.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the status of the family doctor service within the NHS; [15828]

(2) what plans he has to propose amendments to the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill *[Lords]*. [15816]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the opening statement on Second Reading of the National Health Service (Primary Care) Bill on 11 February, *Official Report*, at columns *146–158*.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of research funded by the Government into multiple sclerosis and on his plans for extending it. [15865]

Mr. Malone: The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. In addition to work specifically on multiple sclerosis, the MRC also undertakes work under the broader headings of auto-immune disorders, diseases of the central nervous system, and neurodegenerative diseases, all of which underpin research into MS. Results of Government-funded research are made freely and widely available.

Cancer Research

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of cancer research funded by the Government and on his plans for extending it. [15866]

Mr. Malone: The Government's commitment to prevention of ill health caused by cancer is set out in "The Health of the Nation". The national health service research and development programme's research and development priorities in cancer is an example of the Government's commitment to encourage research into the causes, prevention, early detection and treatment of all cancers. In 1995–96, the Government spent some £25 million on research into cancer. Results of Government-funded research are made freely and widely available.

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many CJD cases designated *(a)* definite and *(b)* probable by his Department in the years 1988 to 1995 fell in the age range of (i) 0 to 20, (ii) 21 to 30, (iii) 31 to 40, (iv) 41 to 50, (v) 51 to 60, (vi) 61 to 70 and (vii) over 70 years at the time of death. [16128]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is given in the table.

Cases of definite and probable sporadic CJD by age at death (1988 to 1991)

	1988		1989		1990		1991	
Age range	*Definite*	*Probable*	*Definite*	*Probable*	*Definite*	*Probable*	*Definite*	*Probable*
0 to 20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
21 to 30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
31 to 40	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
41 to 50	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	0
51 to 60	4	3	5	2	9	2	9	1

Cases of definite and probable sporadic CJD by age at death (1988 to 1991)

Age range	1988		1989		1990		1991	
	Definite	Probable	Definite	Probable	Definite	Probable	Definite	Probable
61 to 70	5	4	5	4	10	0	13	3
70+	1	2	6	5	2	0	4	1
Total	[1]12	9	16	12	24	2	27	5

[1] Including one case age unknown.

Cases of definite and probable sporadic CJD by age at death (1992 to 1995)

Age range	1992		1993		1994		1995	
	Definite	Probable	Definite	Probable	Definite	Probable	Definite	Probable
0 to 20	0	0	0	0	0	0	[1]1	0
21 to 30	0	0	0	0	0	0	[1]2	0
31 to 40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
41 to 50	2	0	1	0	4	1	0	0
51 to 60	6	1	6	0	8	0	8	0
61 to 70	17	3	14	4	15	4	13	1
70+	12	3	10	3	19	2	9	3
Total	37	7	31	7	46	7	33	4

[1] New variant CJD cases.

Diprosone

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the reasons for the proposed inclusion of Diprosone on the list of drugs to be excluded from prescription. [16132]

Mr. Malone: A decision on whether to include Diprosone on the list of drugs to be excluded from prescription by general practitioners has been deferred pending the receipt of further advice from the advisory committee on national health service drugs.

Travel Vaccines

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reviews the Government are currently conducting in relation to travel vaccines; when the results of this review are expected to be published; what body is carrying out the review; and what representations have been received about the review. [16331]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health, as part of a continuing internal review of the current arrangements for travel vaccines, is seeking to resolve the anomalies which exist at present. We shall consult interested bodies once we have proposals to present.

General Practitioners (Computers)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide figures comparable to those in his answer of 2 April 1996, *Official Report*, columns *175–76*, for the reimbursement of the costs of the computerisation in general practice and the numbers of fundholding and non-fundholding practices and general practitioners in 1995–96; if the figures given for the reimbursement of the costs of computerisation include the expenditure on computers to support general practitioner fundholding reported in table 13 of his Departmental report published in March 1996; and if he will make a statement. [16628]

Mr. Malone: The total amount directly reimbursed to general practitioners from public funds towards the costs of computerisation in the financial year 1995–96 was £64 million[1]. Information on the apportionment of these costs between fundholders and other GPs is not available centrally.

The figures previously provided to the hon. Member on 2 April, *Official Report*, columns *175—76*, include reimbursements for the costs of computers to support GP fundholding as shown in table 13 of the departmental report published in March 1996.

The related figures for the number of fundholding and non-fundholding practices and general practitioners for 1995–96 are as follows[2]:

England—April 1995

	Total	Fundholding	Non-fundholding
Unrestricted principals	26,647	10,456	16,191
Practices	9,063	2,613	6,450

Source:

[1] The annual financial returns of the family health services authority (provisional data).

[2] Enhanced GP census.

Criminal Record Checks

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the procedures are for criminal record checks through the voluntary organisations consultancy service pursuant to arrangements made under Home Office circular 47/93; and which organisation or categories of organisation are eligible for such checks. [16588]

Mr. Burns: The procedures for criminal record checks through the voluntary organisations consultancy service are set out in Home Office circular 42/94, copies of which are available in the Library. Checks are available to all major national voluntary child care providers.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many checks were made under the arrangements for criminal record checks through the voluntary

organisations consultancy service, pursuant to arrangements made under Home Office circular 117/92. [16589]

Mr. Burns: The current arrangements for criminal record checks through the voluntary organisations consultancy service are set out in Home Office circular 42/94. In the year 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996, 8,857 checks were carried out for the VOCS by police forces in England and Wales.

Meningitis

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the current research projects into meningitis *(a)* to which his Department has provided funds and *(b)* which other Government agencies have funded; and what proposals he has to increase the level and range of such research projects. [15372]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 11 February 1997]:* The Department of Health supports a number of research projects into meningitis through both the policy research programme and the National Health Service Executive. The PRP commissioned a two-year clinical trial of candidate meningococcal vaccines in 1993 at a total cost of £198,528. More research is needed before their suitability for widespread use can be considered. The Department is currently working with the Public Health Laboratory Service, the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control and the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research to take this work forward. We also collaborate internationally in this area, for example the UK and Dutch health departments are working together to accelerate the development of group B meningococcal vaccines.

Since 1993, the NHS Executive has supported a number of meningitis-related research projects worth £220,000. This includes a current study: neurodevelopmental examination at nine years of age of children who suffered neonatal meningitis. This is funded through North Thames regional office at a cost of £80,000.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The MRC received its grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology, which is part of the Department of Trade and Industry. Current projects receiving support from the MRC are listed as follows:

MRC-supported meningitis research

Indirect Support

Project grants

1. Dr. D. J. Maskell, Department of Biochemistry, Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine, London—The molecular genetics of lipid A-KDO biosynthesis by Haemophilus influenzae and Neisseria meningitidis.
2. Professor J. E. Heckels, Department of Molecular Microbiology, University of Southampton—Antigens from meningococcal outer membrane proteins as vaccine candidates.
3. Dr. D. Ala'Aldeen, Dr. I. Todd and Professor S. P. Boriello, Department of Microbiology, University of Nottingham—Identification of T-cell epitopes involved in protective immunity to meningococcal infection.
4. Professor J. R. Saunders, Department of Genetics and Microbiology, University of Liverpool—Pilin variation and glycosylation in modulating pilus mediated adherence of Neisseria meningitidis to human cells.
5. Dr. H. Palmer, Institute of Infections and Immunity, University of Nottingham—Development of a pig model for meningococcal meningitis.

Strategic project grant

Professor S. P. Boriello, Department of Microbiology, University of Nottingham—Clinical research Initiative in bacterial infections: determinants of tissue damage is bacterial infections.

Programme grant

Professor E. R. Moxon, Molecular Infectious Diseases Group, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford—Molecular basis of Haemophilus influenza pathogenicity.

Infrastructure grant

Professor P. S. Watt and Professor S. T. Holgate—Mucosal Immunology—A Protein engineering laboratory for studies on vaccine design and asthma research.

Direct support

MRC Laboratories, The Gambia—An efficacy study of the Haemophilus influenzae Type b (Hib) polysaccaride-protein conjugate vaccine, PRP-T in The Gambia.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Franchising Advisory Group

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column 11, on the Franchising Advisory Committee, what were the dates of the two occasions on which the committee met; which organisations were represented at the meetings; when the members of the committee were advised of the decision to discontinue the committee; and what are the more effective mechanisms for communications and consultation which have been developed by the Legal Aid Board. [15494]

Mr. Streeter: The Franchising Advisory Committee met on 11 February 1994 and 14 October 1994. The organisations represented were: the Advice Services Alliance, Legal Aid Practitioners' Group, the Law Society and the National Consumer Council. The committee was informed in January 1997 of the board's decision to disband it.

Since October 1994, the board has held regular meetings of franchise liaison user groups. To date, 156 meetings have been held at various locations throughout England and Wales. At national level the board has met with the Advice Services Alliance on 13 occasions, the Legal Aid Practitioners' Group on five occasions and the Law Society on 12 occasions at which franchise issues have been raised. Those meetings are to continue.

Queen's Counsel (Selection)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what costs were incurred by the Lord Chancellor's Department in conducting the procedure for selecting Queen's Counsel for 1996. [15482]

Mr. Streeter: The departmental expenditure apportionable to the procedure for selecting Queen's Counsel in 1996 is estimated to be £81,202.

Chancel Repairs

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the Government's estimate of the cost of compensating the Church of England for abolishing the chancel repairing liability. [15683]

Mr. Streeter: No such estimate has been prepared because the Law Commission report on this subject made no recommendation for compensation, a position which the Church of England and the Church in Wales are content to adopt.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what are the arrangements for those carrying out property searches to discover whether a particular property is affected by liability for chancel repairs. [15681]

Mr. Streeter: Searches may be carried out in the tithe records now held at the Public Records Office.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what discussions his Department has had with the Church of England in the last year regarding liability for chancel repairs. [15685]

Mr. Streeter: There has been one exchange of letters between my Department and the general secretary of the General Synod of the Church of England.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many representations the Government have received in the last year on the Law Commission report No. 152, "Property Law: Liability for Chancel Repairs". [15684]

Mr. Streeter: Apart from discussions within Government, my Department has corresponded with three bodies and two individual Members of Parliament.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in respect of chancel repairing liabilities on properties, how many *(a)* properties and *(b)* hectares are affected; how many parishes benefit; if he will list those parishes; and by how much the Church of England benefited in each of the last 10 years. [15680]

Mr. Streeter: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tithes

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on what date tithes were abolished; and what has been the total paid in compensation by the Government to the Church of England. [15682]

Mr. Streeter: The Tithe Act 1836 made provision for the conversion of existing tithes into tithe rent charges. Those were converted into tithe redemption annuities by the Tithe Act 1936, and ceased to be payable in 1977. Figures on compensation are not held centrally.

Bradfield House School, Devon

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many boys from Bradfield house school, Cullompton, Devon appeared before the Cullompton juvenile court; and what percentage of total cases this constituted in 1996. [16347]

Mr. Streeter: I have been informed by the court that, out of 52 appearances before the Cullompton Youth Court in 1996, Bradfield house school was given as the defendant's address in 15 cases. That represents 29 per cent. of all appearances. In some instances, a defendant may have appeared on more than one occasion.

Legal Aid

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if he will list the *(a)* 20 solicitors firms and *(b)* barristers who have received the largest sums of money from the legal aid scheme for each year for which information is available. [8700]

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, which firms of solicitors received more than £500,000 from the legal aid fund in 1995–96; how much they each received; and what sum they have received in 1996–97. [12309]

Mr. Streeter *[holding answer 29 January 1997]:* It has not proved possible to provide all the information in the form requested. I have therefore written to the hon. Members and placed a copy of the letters in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 17 February; and if he will make a statement. [16858]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office, represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture Council in Brussels on 17 February.

The main business of the Council was to consider the Commission's proposed regulations establishing a system of identification and registration of cattle, together with a linked proposal on the labelling of beef and beef products. The importance to the United Kingdom of early progress on the setting up of an EU-wide animal identification and registration system was emphasised in the Council discussions, subject to the proposal being technically sound and workable. However, my noble Friend expressed reservations about the practicability of the proposed funding arrangements. The presidency informed the Council that further work would continue urgently on these proposals with a view to the Council being in a position to reach agreement if possible at its March meeting.

Prompted by discussion papers tabled by the Italian and United Kingdom Governments, the Council held a wide-ranging debate on the future of the Common Market organisation in milk and milk products, in particular the future of the EU milk quota regime. The United Kingdom pressed for early progress on reforming the milk regime in view of World Trade Organisation and budgetary constraints, as well as the prospect of future EU enlargement. In the light of the Council discussion, the

European Commission undertook to bring forward shortly a detailed analysis of the milk sector and ideas for possible changes to the milk quota regime.

The Council held a brief discussion on the situation in the beef and veal sector, in particular on the early marketing and calf processing schemes. My noble Friend took the opportunity to press for a reduction in the rates of payment under the calf processing scheme which, at their present levels, risked creating distortions in the market.

The Agriculture Commissioner presented reports to the Council on options for reform of the EU market regimes for tobacco and olive oil. Legislative proposals will be made to the Council in the near future on changes to the tobacco regime. The Council will consider in detail the options for reforming the olive oil regime at its forthcoming meetings.

BSE

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to impose a ban on all beef and beef products, originating in countries which *(a)* cannot demonstrate a total absence of BSE in their cattle herds and *(b)* have not instituted a complete ban on specified bovine material and the use of animal protein in animal rations. [14769]

Mrs. Browning: The Fresh Meat (Beef Control) Regulations 1996 prohibit the sale for human consumption of all bovine meat derived from bovines which at the time of slaughter were more than 30 months old. This measure applies to cattle slaughtered on or after 29 March 1996 whether in the United Kingdom or overseas, other than those born, reared and slaughtered in specific third countries set out in the regulations. This list of countries is confined to those where the Government are satisfied that we can import beef without risk because they are free of BSE. Other countries, including all other member states, are covered by the 30-month rule.

The Government do not believe that it is necessary to go beyond this and institute a wider ban on the basis proposed by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) in order to protect public health. Those member states which have endemic BSE already have controls in place to remove bovine offals which are similar in nature to those in this country. The Government have strongly supported European Commission proposals to introduce controls on bovine offals on a Community-wide basis which were discussed by the Council in December and rejected. We are pressing the Commission to introduce revised proposals shortly.

The European Community already has a prohibition on the use of mammalian protein in ruminant rations, with certain exceptions. The United Kingdom law goes further and covers mammalian meat and bonemeal in all farm animal rations but neither European Community nor UK law prohibits the use of all animal protein in animal rations. In particular exceptions are made for mammalian proteins such as milk and there are no prohibitions on fish or avian proteins in any animal feed nor any scientific basis on which to justify such action.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many responses he has received to the consultation document, "Proposal for a UK Certified Herds Scheme"; from what source; and if his Department will publish a summary of those responses. [15874]

Mr. Baldry: Forty eight replies were received in the UK to the consultation document, "Proposal for a UK Certified Herds Scheme". A list of those who responded and copies of their responses can be examined at the libraries of the Agricultural Departments.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress in discussions with the European Commission on the introduction of a UK certified herds scheme. [15876]

Mr. Baldry: We have been working closely with the Commission on our proposals for an export certified herds scheme and intend formally to submit those proposals shortly. Thereafter, the proposals will be subject to the process laid down in the Florence agreement, which includes: consultation with the Scientific Veterinary Committee, the Multi Disciplinary Scientific Committee and, where appropriate, other relevant scientific committees, in tandem with discussions in the Standing Veterinary Committee. In the light of those discussions, the Commission will take a decision using established procedures and will subsequently fix the date when exports can effectively resume following a successful outcome of a Community inspection.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response his Department has made to the criticisms by the National Farmers Union of the proposed certified herds scheme. [15875]

Mr. Baldry: We are finalising our proposals for an export certified herds scheme in the light of comments made on our consultation document from the National Farmers Union and others.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is the Government's policy to press for a lifting of the European ban first on certified herds in Northern Ireland. [15877]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the full statement by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster during the debate on the BSE crisis, *Official Report*, columns *708–13*. My right hon. Friend made it clear that the export certified herds scheme we will put forward to the Commission applies to the whole United Kingdom but that Northern Ireland, with its computerised cattle tracing system and low incidence of BSE, would derive immediate and significant benefit from our proposals.

ADAS (Sale)

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the sale of ADAS has been agreed. [17133]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I are pleased to announce, that following independent financial advice from PA Strategy Partners Ltd., we have selected the management and employee buy-out—MEBO—team led by the current chief executive, Phillip Needham, as the preferred bidder for ADAS.

The deal which has been agreed meets all the objectives which I announced on 4 November 1966, *Official Report*, column *313*. The overall net present value to the taxpayer of the MEBO bid is some £23.5 million, made up of the consideration for the business, savings flowing from the pricing structure for future services for MAFF and the Welsh Office, and rents for the properties occupied by ADAS.

We expect to exchange contracts on the sale very shortly. Completion will be subject to the requirement to inform and consult appropriate representatives of ADAS employees under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (as amended).

Agri-environment Schemes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what funding his Department has allocated in the current year for the operation of agri-environment schemes; and if he will make a statement on the operation of the schemes. [15209]

Mr. Boswell: The 1995 public expenditure survey provision allocated a total of £76.3 million to the operation of agri-environment schemes in England for 1996–97. Of this total, £60.6 million was for payments to land managers, £12.5 million was for running costs and £3.2 million was for monitoring costs.

The agri-environment programme provides a wide range of voluntary incentive schemes to encourage environmentally beneficial farming practices. The Ministry carries out a monitoring programme to measure the success of each scheme and the detailed results of these are published. Schemes will normally be evaluated and reviewed every five years to assess the extent to which policy objectives are being achieved and the efficiency with which schemes are being administered. For example, the five stage I environmentally sensitive areas underwent their second five-yearly policy review in 1996. Results of a comprehensive programme of environmental monitoring have shown the schemes to be successful. A public consultation exercise detailing proposals for improvements to the scheme was conducted as part of the review and, as a result, several new tiers and options have recently been introduced.

The schemes are kept under review and consultation arrangements have recently been expanded at both national and local level to ensure that we get the best out of our schemes.

The Agriculture Select Committee is nearing the conclusion of its inquiry into the Ministry's agri-environment schemes and I look forward to receipt of its report.

Tobacco

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his statement in European Standing Committee A on 12 February, *Official Report*, column 2, what is the approximate annual production in

the European Union of raw tobacco and its cost to the common agricultural policy in (i) ecus and (ii) pounds sterling; and what are the annual figures for the three most recent years for which figures are available for *(a)* quantities of tobacco consumed within the European Union and *(b)* the tonnage exported to each of the principal export destinations. [16022]

Mr. Baldry: The latest figures available on EU tobacco production are for the 1994 harvest when 337,091 tonnes were produced. The current annual cost of the tobacco regime is approximately 1 billion ecus or £750 million[1]. For the three most recent years for which figures are available, the quantities of tobacco consumed within the European Union and the tonnages exported to principal destinations were as follows:

tonnes

	1993	*1994*	*1995*
EU consumption[2]	497,789	560,434	485,297
Total EU exports	195,882	192,362	272,179
Principal export destinations:			
Russia	32,832	9,449	19,024
USA	26,021	19,370	21,188
Algeria	15,553	14,645	17,791
Egypt	14,415	38,933	13,564
Romania	14,370	7,067	3,689
Switzerland	8,860	11,704	12,117
Japan	8,597	8,208	9,583
Poland	7,259	9,321	12,359
Hungary	4,653	2,727	80,204
South Africa	944	1,863	13,864

Source:
Eurostat.
Notes:
[1] Using an exchange rate of 1 ecu = £0.7493.
[2] Consumption, based on production and imports minus exports.

Cattle Cull

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what have been the total costs incurred to date for slaughter, rendering incineration and storage of carcases under the over-30-months scheme. [16244]

Mr. Baldry: As at 31 January 1997, the following amounts had been paid:

	£ million
Slaughter	65.6
Rendering	42.1
Incineration	5.4
Storage of carcases	11.6

BSE (Chickens)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what measures he has taken to prevent the spread of BSE to chickens; [16135]

(2) what action he has taken to investigate whether BSE *(a)* can and *(b)* has spread to chickens. [16136]

Mrs. Browning: There is no scientific evidence to suggest that chickens are susceptible to transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. In experimental attempts to establish disease, BSE has not been transmitted to poultry either by oral exposure or by direct inoculation into the brain. Challenged birds survived to five years post-inoculation. Further tests have been carried out on tissues from these chickens by inoculation into further chickens and into mice to see if any infectivity can be detected. These are now eight months post-inoculation without evidence of transmission. I am aware of the recent press reports suggesting that TSEs have been identified in chickens. My Department has been informed by the researcher who holds the material in question that no pathological examination of brain tissue has yet been carried out. My Department has informed him that if on examination a TSE is suspected, he is under a legal obligation to surrender the material to a veterinary inspector of the Ministry of Agriculture for further analyses.

The feeding of mammalian meat and bonemeal to all farm animals, which includes poultry, has been banned since 29 March 1996. This ban was put in place to prevent the accidental feeding of ruminants with feed intended for pigs and poultry, which prior to 29 March could legally have contained meat and bonemeal.

Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the *(a)* number and *(b)* species of the zoo animals in which spongiform encephalopathy has been confirmed between 1988 and the present time. [16129]

Mrs. Browning: The following table gives the number of confirmed transmissible spongiform encephalopathy cases in animals kept in zoological collections in Great Britain as at 1 February 1997[1]:

Confirmed cases shown by year of clinical onset or year of confirmation	*Species*
1986	Nyala
1987	Gemsbok
1988	[1]—
1989	Oryx (Arabian) Kudu, Eland
1990	Kudu
1991	Eland(3), Kudu
1992	Puma, Kudu(3), Cheetah, Oryx (scimitar horned)
1993	Cheetah[2]
1994	Ocelot, Eland
1995	Puma(2), Eland, Tiger(2)
1996	Ocelot, Bison

It is not possible to provide the data by date of confirmation or to give details of suspect cases which were not subsequently confirmed as central records are not compiled in this way. Furthermore, there was no statutory requirement to report diagnosis of a spongiform encephalopathy other than BSE or scrapie until November 1994. MAFF would not therefore have been informed of suspect cases for which laboratory examination proved to be negative. To provide the information in the way requested could be done only at disproportionate costs.

[1] Two cases in Ankole cows were recorded in the BSE statistics for cattle for 1991.

[2] Two further cheetahs were confirmed in foreign zoos, having been born and infected in a British zoo.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of spongiform encephalopathy have been *(a)* suspected and *(b)* confirmed in each of the last 10 years, broken down by species. [16223]

Mrs. Browning: The following table gives the number of suspected and confirmed cases of BSE in Great Britain as at 7 February 1996. The cases before 21 June 1988 are recorded by date of clinical onset of disease and the cases thereafter are recorded by date of restriction:

Year	*Suspected*[1]	*Confirmed*[4]
1986	[2]—	7
1987	[2]—	435
1988	2,516	2,469
1989	8,447	7,137
1990	17,323	14,181
1991	30,009	[5]25,032
1992	44,846	36,682
1993	42,931	34,370
1994	30,261	23,944
1995	17,946	14,298
1996	10,688	[3]7,323

[1] Incomplete data.
[2] BSE not a notifiable disease prior to 21 June 1988, details of suspect cases not available.
[3] Suspects restricted—only cases showing clinical signs suspicious of BSE are placed under restriction. Some suspects reported by owners will not on close examination justify service of restriction. No central records are kept of such cases.
[4] BSE confirmed—The figures are significantly in arrears of restriction as there will inevitably be a delay in examining the brains, and some animals placed under restriction in 1996 will not yet have been slaughtered.
[5] Includes two Ankole cows in zoos recorded as normal BSE cases.

The following table gives the number of suspected and confirmed cases of scrapie in Great Britain as at 18 February 1997.

Year	*Suspected*	*Confirmed*
1986	[1]—	156
1987	[1]—	179
1988	[1]—	215
1989	[1]—	246
1990	[1]—	[2]348
1991	[1]—	[2]989
1992	[1]—	[2]666
1993	492	327
1994	291	199
1995	220	163
1996	[2]339	209
1997	[4]35	—

[1] Details of suspect cases unavailable. Scrapie became a notifiable disease on 1 January 1993.
[2] Figures are distorted because payments were offered for cases between October 1990 and August 1992 when brain pools were being assembled for rendering experiments.
[3] Some results due.
[4] All results due.

The following list gives the number of confirmed cases of feline spongiform encephalopathy by year of confirmation in Great Britain as at 1 February 1997:

1990: 12
1991: 12
1992: 10
1993: 11
1994: 16
1995: 8
1996: 6

Information on cases in other species is recorded in the answer to the hon. Member's other question about zoo animals.

British Agrochemicals Association Ltd.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what meetings he has had with the British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the past 12 months; what was the subject of the meetings; and if he will make a statement; [16289]

(2) what representations he has received from British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. in the past 12 months; what was the subject of those representations; and if he will make a statement. [16286]

Mrs. Browning: British Agrochemicals Association Ltd. has not sought a meeting with my right hon. Friend or other MAFF Ministers in the last 12 months but the association is frequently in contact with our officials to discuss issues relating to the regulation of pesticides.

In addition, the association has made formal representations to the Department on a number of issues including: updating of UK regulations on pesticides and European legislation on plant protection products; clarification of the arrangements for the authorisation of adjuvants; EC proposals for maximum residue levels in food; enforcement of maximum residue levels in protected lettuce; review of standards for the approval of amateur pesticides; the 1997–98 fees and charges structure and application arrangements operated by the Pesticides Safety Directorate; revision of the code of practice for the safe use of pesticides on farms and holdings; revision of the code of practice for suppliers of pesticides of agriculture, horticulture and forestry; labelling and risk management strategies for pesticides and terrestrial non-target arthropods; pesticide label phrases regarding the risk to honeybees; and a proposed MAFF booklet on pesticides in integrated farming.

Pesticides and Fertilisers

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the total amount of *(a)* pesticides and *(b)* fertilisers sold each year for the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [16293]

Mrs. Browning: The current and constant price series given in the table show estimates of sales of pesticides and fertilisers for agricultural use in the UK. The constant price series are valued at the prices of pesticides and fertiliser in 1990. This is the best guide to changes in volumes as different types of fertiliser and pesticide are weighted according to their relative values in 1990.

Value of UK purchases for agricultural use

	Current prices, £ million		*Constant 1990 prices, £ million*	
	(a) Pesticides	*(b) Fertilisers and lime*	*(a) Pesticides*	*(b) Fertilisers and lime*
1987	360	788	429	825
1988	440	745	506	753
1989	482	781	530	801
1990	459	807	459	807
1991	440	776	399	794
1992	428	675	375	729
1993	449	615	386	693

Value of UK purchases for agricultural use

	Current prices, £ million		*Constant 1990 prices, £ million*	
	(a) Pesticides	*(b) Fertilisers and lime*	*(a) Pesticides*	*(b) Fertilisers and lime*
1994	443	715	365	765
1995	443	777	377	747
1996[1]	459	823	372	716

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's search for cattle associated with BSE cases to be culled under the terms of the Florence agreement; how many cattle have been identified so far; what is his latest estimate of the likely total; how many farms are involved; and what is his estimate of the time scale for completing this search and concluding the accelerated cull. [16320]

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has responsibility for conducting the cull throughout Great Britain. The reply is therefore on a Great Britain-wide basis.

On-farm visits to natal herds in which a confirmed case of BSE was born started in the week beginning 27 January. The total number of cattle that have been identified through these visits as having been exposed to the same feed as BSE cases is 4,439. Of this number, 199 animals have so far been confirmed as exposed by the central veterinary unit: 71 of these are still in the natal herd; 128 have moved and need to be traced further. The latest estimate of the number of cattle affected in Great Britain is 90,000 to 100,000. However, the true number of animals affected can be determined only by on-farm visits.

There are natal herds in over 7,000 farms in Great Britain. Farms which have bought in exposed animals will also be affected. Again, the number of such farms can be established only through visits to the natal herds and subsequent tracing visits.

It is very difficult at this early stage to estimate the length of time it will take to conclude the cull.

Organophosphates (Animal Health)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what current long-term research Her Majesty's Government have commissioned on organophosphates and animal health; and if he will make a statement. [15425]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 12 February 1997]:* There are no current long-term Government commissioned research projects on organophosphates and animal health.

The Government have, however, awarded £500,000 to the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh for research into the possible long-term human health effects of organophosphorus sheep dips. The results of that study are expected in 1999.

DEFENCE

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 October, *Official Report*, column *924*, on the discovery of mustard gas during the Gulf war, when he intends to send the letter to the hon. Member; and if he will list the reasons for the delay in writing. [14916]

Mr. Soames: I have written today.

Departmental Expenditure (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the annual expenditure by his Department in Wales on *(a)* employment of service staff, *(b)* employment of civilian staff and *(c)* procurement. [16271]

Mr. Soames: The estimate of expenditure in the current financial year on employment in Wales of *(a)* service personnel pay is £118.69 million and *(b)* civilian staff is £96,773 million. Figures for the current financial year for Defence procurement in Wales are not available. The latest for which figures are available is 1994–95 when the total was £50 million, exclusive of VAT. This does not include expenditure by the armed forces for the provision of local services, for which figures are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Low Flying

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many collisions involving low-flying military aircraft have occurred over the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years. [16133]

Mr. Soames: The number of collisions involving low-flying military aircraft over the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years is as follows:

1987: 2
1988: 1
1989: nil
1990: 1
1991: 1
1992: nil
1993: 1
1994: nil
1995: nil
1996: nil

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the automatic low flying flight planning enquiry and notification system—ALFENS—was not introduced in mid-1992; when he now expects the system to come into operation; and what penalties have been incurred by the contractors as a result of the delays. [16134]

Mr. Soames: As explained in detail to the House of Commons Defence Committee (HC314, Session 1993–4, pages 15–17), the original time scale for the introduction of ALFENS in mid-1992 was based on the best information available to National Air Traffic Services, which let the contract and manage it on behalf of the MOD, at an early stage of the procurement process. This

date was not achieved due chiefly to delays caused by changes to the scope and complexity of the project and a number of problems with the submission and evaluation of tenders. We hope to see ALFENS in use by this summer. The contractors have carried out additional work at their own expense to rectify faults in the system.

Naval Movements (Ayrshire)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the deployments of naval vessels off the coast of Ayrshire and naval aircraft in Ayrshire on 31 January, indicating what types and numbers of craft were involved, the reasons for their deployment and the costs of the deployments. [16334]

Mr. Soames: There were two separate training activities which involved naval vessels being off the Ayrshire coast on 31 January. The first was UK mine counter measures group training consisting of four Hunt class MCM vessels. The second involved the NATO standing naval force channel conducting training independent of the UK group and this included the use of one UK MCM vessel with one coastal survey vessel in support. MCM operations off the Ayrshire coast are part of normal Royal Navy activity and all costs were fully contained within the annual training budget. No additional costs were incurred.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16175]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information on employment agencies used by MOD is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It is my Department's policy to use agencies on the following circumstances: to provide staff as an interim measure where directly employed labour cannot be provided; to assist recruitment authorities on all or part of the recruitment selection process, but most recruitment is undertaken in house.

Information, where available, in respect of defence agencies is a matter for the chief executive concerned, who will be writing to the hon. Member separately.

Letter from C. A. Gordon to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as the Deputy Chief Executive of the Army Individual Training Organisation.

This Agency came into being on 1 April 1996 and I am therefore quoting figures from that date. Details of this Agency's use of private employment agencies are listed below:

Agency	*Number supplied*	*Contract period*	*Cost £*	*Profession*
Office Angels	1	12 months	1,500	Typist
Kellock Ltd.	3	12 months		Clerical
Corinth Medical	1	12 months	50,612	Nurse
Select Appts	2	12 months		Stores
Reed Staffing	1	Not known	11,000	Nurse
Barkers Personnel	5	Various	3,580.72	Typist
HMR Employment	2	12 months	14,000	Nurse
Fleet Industrial	1	4 weeks	1,358	Chef
Actionline	1	3 months	1,910	Typist
Brook Street Index Recruitment Stirling Rec	28	weekly	24,219	Industrial
P and D Employment	7	weekly	7,638	Industrial
P and D Driving	2	3 weeks	1,568	Drivers
Barkers Personnel	2	3 weeks	1,347	Typist
Reed Employment	4	2 weeks	1,375	Clerical
Stirling Rec	1	11 weeks	2,926	Clerical
Stirling Rec	2	28 weeks	15,245	Clerical
Hays Accountancy	3	13 weeks	12,437	Accountants
Involve (BDT)	2	3 months	14,000	Lecturers
BNA	1	6.5 weeks	3,650	Nurse
Crown Nursing	1	29 weeks	14,150	Nurse
ADECCO UK	1	10 weeks	6,800	Safety Officer
ADECCO UK	1	6 weeks	7,800	Technical
ADECCO UK	1	3 weeks	2,900	Lecturer
Reed Employment	1	12 months	7,000	Typist
Reed Employment	1	3 months	5,000	Typist
Bucks and Berks	1	6 months	6,500	Typist
Bucks and Berks	1	5.5 months	5,500	Clerical
Reed Employment	1	12 months	14,000	Clerical
Reed Employment	4	10 weeks	7,542	Typist
Personnel Select	1	2 weeks	561	Typist
Crown Nursing	2	11 weeks	18,505	Nurse
Battleway	1	13 weeks	2,915	Labourer

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from Mr. S. R. Hill to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of employment agencies as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO).

2. Attached is a summary of the statistics for this Agency.

Parliamentary Question no 3243H—Agency Staff

1. Agencies used in the last 3 years are:

Barker Personnel Services

Brook Street

J M Recruitment

Wise Employment

2. Numbers employed by the Agencies in NARO Fleetlands Division:

Barker Personnel Services: 1

Brook Street: 2

J M Recruitment: 6

Wise Employment: 1

3. Costs over the last 3 years are:

Agency	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £	*Median cost (total cost divided by number of people* £
Barker Personnel Services	13,500	15,500	18,000	15,666
Brook Street	nil	3,000	9,000	3,000
J M Recruitment	nil	nil	12,000	2,000
Wise Employment	Nil	nil	200	200

4. The average length of contracts is as follows:

Barker Personnel Services: 1 year

Brook Street: 5 months

J M Recruitment: 1 month

Wise Employment: 1 week

Letter from J. R. Drew to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him to list the private employment agencies used by the department and its agencies in each of the last three years. For the Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO) this matter falls within my responsibilities as Chief Executive.

I have enclosed the details you requested on a separate sheet. It should be noted that the number of staff engaged through employment agencies was unusually high in 1995–96 and 1996–97 because of the need temporarily to replace vital skills lost during the rundown of ABRO Old Dalby, which closed at the end of December 1996.

ABRO: Use of employment agencies

a. Agencies used[1]	*b. Numbers of posts filled*	*c. Cost*[2] £
1994–95		
Turner Charles Ltd., Staff UK, British Nursing Corporation	5	96,955
1995–96		
Turner Charles Ltd., Staff UK, British Nursing Corporation, Kelly Services, Matchmaker Personnel	30	205,514
1996–97		

ABRO: Use of employment agencies

a. Agencies used[1]	*b. Numbers of posts filled*	*c. Cost*[2] £
Turner Charles Ltd., Omega Personnel, Dargue Staff, Select Appointments, Partners Employment, Mitrem Employment Service, Personnel Placements, British Nursing Co-op Ltd., Kelly Services, Matchmaker Personnel	37	210,117

The average length of contract is 1 year 4 months.

[1] The individual fees for companies are not given as they are commercially confidential.

[2] It is not clear what is meant by the median cost paid to the employment agency. The employment agencies are paid an hourly rate for staff supplied.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about dealings with private employment agencies over the past three years as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency.

We make only limited use of contract staff from private employment agencies, usually to deal with surges in our workload. Unfortunately, our records are not kept in a form which would permit a precise answer to your question without incurring undue expense. However, I hope the following information will meet your needs:

Agency	*Total expenditure* £
1994–95[1]	
Manpower	32,300.64
Josephine Sammons	4,347.93
Total cost for year	36,648.57
1995–96[2]	
Manpower	30,630.98
Josephine Sammons	2,533.86
Total cost for year	33,164.84
1996–97[3]	
Manpower	13,603.88
JM Recruitment	3,639.34
Total cost for year	17,243.22

[1] Approximately four people were recruited during the year with an estimated median cost per week of £230.

[2] Approximately eight people were recruited during the year with an estimated median cost per week of £230.

[3] Approximately six people were recruited during the year with an estimated median cost per week of £250.

Letter from Julian Hunt to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about staff supplied by private employment agencies, as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office.

The Meteorological Office use agencies only rarely and the information you requested is given below:

1996

(a) Manpower

Josephine Sammons Employment Agency

Hays Accountancy Personnel

(b) 8

(c) £40,800 median £425 per week

(d) 112 weeks

1995

(a) Manpower

(b) 2

(c) £9,120

(d) 3 months

1994

Nil

I hope this gives you the information you require.

Letter from John Trewby to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 18 February 1997:

I am replying as the Chief Executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency to your question to the Minister of State for Defence Procurement about private employment agencies.

The Naval Bases and Supply Agency launched in December 1996 and is formed from a number of management areas within the MOD. Information such as you have requested was not previously held on a consistent basis, the attached charts give the information which is available.

Private employment agencies used by NBSA

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
J. M. Recruitment			
Number of staff employed	14	19	21
Total cost to the NBSA	£16,176	£81,373	£63,211
Median cost per person	£1,155	£4,282	£3,010
Average length of contract	1 month	4 months	3 months
Manpower			
Number of staff employed	1	3	1
Total cost to the NBSA	£884	£13,200	£7,263
Median cost per person	£884	£4,400	£7,263
Average length of contract	3 weeks	4 months	6 months
Brook Street			
Number of staff employed	1	nil	nil
Total cost to the NBSA	£162	nil	nil
Median cost per person	nil	nil	nil
Average length of contract	1 week	nil	nil
SMS			
Number of staff employed	95	100	139
Total cost to the NBSA	£40,150	£42,485	£68,932
Median cost per person	£432	£425	£496
Average length of contract	2 weeks	2 weeks	2 weeks
Crown Nursing Agency			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	5
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£7,712
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£1,542
Average length of contract	nil	nil	3 days
TAV			
Number of staff employed	nil	3	nil
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	£12,320	nil
Median cost per person	nil	£4,106	nil
Average length of contract	mil	4 months	nil
HMS			
Number of staff employed	nil	3	nil
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	£14,960	nil
Median cost per person	nil	£4,987	nil
Average length of contract	nil	4 months	nil
Ross Campbell Associates			
Number of staff employed	1	1	4
Total cost to the NBSA	£2,000	£6,950	£21,250
Median cost per person	£2,000	£6,950	£5,312
Average length of contract	8 weeks	30 weeks	16 weeks
Search Recruitment Selection			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	3
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£12,800

Private employment agencies used by NBSA

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£4,254
Average length of contract	nil	nil	14 weeks
South Hams Nursing			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	3
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£10,680
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£3,560
Average length of contract	nil	nil	3 months
Drake International			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	15
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£32,400
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£2,160
Average length of contract	nil	nil	4 months
AYS			
Number of staff employed	45	75	83
Total cost to the NBSA	£83,830	£147,790	£289,010
Median cost per person	£1,863	£1,970	£3,482
Average length of contract	3 months	4 months	6 months
Alfred Marks			
Number of staff employed	92	88	97
Total cost to the NBSA	£141,790	£206,300	£319,200
Median cost per person	£1,541	£2,344	£3,290
Average length of contract	3 months	4 months	6 months
Saltash Transport			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	216
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£16,790
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£77
Average length of contract	nil	nil	3 days
Ross Campbell Consultants			
Number of staff employed	Not available	2	3
Total cost to the NBSA	Not available	£2,900	£1,879
Median cost per person	Not available	£1,450	£626
Average length of contract	Not available	5 weeks	2 weeks
Search Consultants			
Number of staff employed	Not available	7	3
Total cost to the NBSA	Not available	£10,997	£6,237
Median cost per person	Not available	£1,571	£2,079
Average length of contract	Not available	2 months	2 months
Fife Nursing Services Ltd.			
Number of staff employed	Not available	4	7
Total cost to the NBSA	Not available	£2,303	£3,246
Median cost per person	Not available	£575	£463
Average length of contract	Not available	1 week	1 week
Office Helpline			
Number of staff employed	nil	5	14
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	£13,339	£44,410
Median cost per person	nil	£2,667	£3,172
Average length of contract	nil	10 weeks	19 weeks
Workforce			
Number of staff employed	nil	27	32
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	£71,398	£79,459
Median cost per person	nil	£2,644	£2,483
Average length of contract	nil	10 weeks	19 weeks
Kellock			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	1
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£6,242
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£6,242
Average length of contract	nil	nil	10 weeks
Reed Staffing			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	1
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£16,029
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£16,029
Average length of contract	nil	nil	20 weeks
Medic International			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	1
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£6,900
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£6,900
Average length of contract	nil	nil	20 weeks

Private employment agencies used by NBSA

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
CSOHS Agency			
Number of staff employed	nil	nil	1
Total cost to the NBSA	nil	nil	£21,538
Median cost per person	nil	nil	£21,538
Average length of contract	nil	nil	23 sessions (medical practitioner)

Letter from Graham Jones to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies, by his Department and its agencies, in each of the last three years for which figures are available, as these matters fall within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency. Specifically, you asked for: the names of the agencies; the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department; the total cost to the Department of using employment agencies; the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited; and the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies.

During the last 3 years the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment has used 5 private employment agencies—Piper Group Ltd, RSD Technology Ltd, Turner Charles Ltd, Inter Europe Technical Services Ltd, Escom Technical Services—to provide professional engineering staff to fill vacancies in the personnel establishment until full-time civil servants are recruited.

In 1994 these agencies supplied 38 personnel on an average contract length of 8½ months. The total cost was £957,486, with a median cost per agency of:

Piper Group Ltd: £26,274.

RSD Technology Ltd: £25,636.

Turner Charles Ltd: £30,856.

Inter Europe Technical Services Ltd: £7,596.

In 1995 these agencies supplied 52 personnel on an average contract length of 8½ months. The total cost was £1,003,425, with a median cost per agency of:

Piper Group Ltd: £26,641.

RSD Technology Ltd: £25,996.

Turner Charles Ltd: £11,412.

Inter Europe Technical Services Ltd: £2,809.

Escom Technical Services: £6,364.

In 1996 these agencies supplied 58 personnel on an average contract length of 7.45 months. The total cost was £1,310,206, with a median cost per agency of:

Piper Group Ltd: £28,781.

RSD Technology Ltd: £29,722.

Turner Charles Ltd: £19,896.

Inter Europe Technical Services Ltd: £11,711.

Escom Technical Services: £24,877.

Letter from Richard Kyle to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES USED BY THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MAINTENANCE GROUP DEFENCE AGENCY

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning private employment agencies used by his Department's Agencies because this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Maintenance Group Defence Agency.

The information readily available is given in the table at Annex A. As a number of the agency staffs are provided through call-off contract arrangements to cover manpower shortages or peak production periods, the information on median costs and contract periods for individual staff cannot easily be discerned, and is therefore not provided.

Employment agencies used by the RAF MGDA

Agency name	*1994–95* £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97* £	*Total cost* £	*Numbers employed*	*Average length of contract (where known)*
Michael Page	39,250	70,819	23,521	133,590	2	—
Doyle Clutton	56,055	50,969	0	107,024	4	2 years
Accountancy Personnel	0	0	27,642	27,642	1	2 years
Read Catering	0	0	48,447	48,447	Average 2	—
Paul Mitchell Associates (Leicester)	6,063	8,470	0	14,533	1	5 months
ACI (Huntington)	0	1,855	0	1,855	1	11 months
BNA (Peterborough)	0	47	1,773	1,820	1	—
Golden Key (Stamford)	0	0	962	962	1	—
Blue Arrow Personnel Services	0	0	28,154	28,154	1	8 months
Hayes Accountancy Personnel	0	54,027	41,572	95,599	3	12 months
Wynnwith Eng. Ltd.	0	[1]307,000	1,500	308,500	not available	—
ORS Recruitment	0	0	9,000	9,000	1	6 months
MPI Aviation Ltd.[1]	0	0	717,670	717,670	Average 53	18 months call-off contract
MPI Aviation Ltd.	0	0	23,520	23,520	4	4 months
Total cost	101,368	493,187	923,761			

[1] This relates to the provision of agency manpower to meet fluctuating task levels.

Letter from Peter Foxton to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to the recent questions you tabled to the Secretary of State for Defence for those matters that fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Base Supply and Distribution Agency (ABSDA). You asked about the use being made of private employment agencies to recruit staff for employment within Defence Agencies, ABSDA has only been in existence since April 1995 and in that time there has only been one occasion where private employment agencies have been requested to recruit staff, and that was in 1996. The Occupational Health and Safety Bureau was tasked to provide a Grade E Nurse as a temporary measure due to difficulties in recruiting full time personnel.

Recruitment and Assessment Services (RAS), a government agency, were requested in August 1996 to seek candidates for the position of Chief Executive of ABSDA on the retirement of the

incumbent. Between the selection procedure and my appointment RAS were privatised. Therefore, you may wish to consider RAS a private employment agency.

The total cost, for both appointments, was £30,289. The length of contract was four months for the Nurse and three years for my tenure of office.

I trust I have answered your questions satisfactorily.

Letter from D. L. Burden to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies by the Ministry of Defence and its Agencies, in so far as it applies to the Army Personnel Centre as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of that Agency.

I should explain that the Army Personnel Centre (APC) formed as an agency on 2 December 1996 and received delegated personnel management responsibility for civilian staff in the APC in Glasgow from 9 December 1996. I can confirm that the APC in Glasgow has not engaged private employment agency staff.

In addition to the staff employed in the APC at Glasgow I also have residual responsibility for staff at a number of sites in England currently involved in APC business. For the provision of civilian staff at Directorate of 'A' Information Systems (Army), Worthy Down, the now vacated sties (Earls Court and Stanmore) in London and the closing sites (Ashton-Under-Lyne, Leicester, Chester, York and Exeter) in England, I was and remain reliant on the respective Civilian Personnel Management Authorities (CPMAs) responsible for recruitment and management of staff within those areas. I envisage that the individual CPMAs will submit responses for collation centrally and, to avoid the risk of duplication, the data on private employment agency staff who have been employed to support the business of the APC at the closing sites would be incorporated into the MOD—collated return.

I hope this is helpful.

Letter from John Prince to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Army Technical Support Agency (ATSA).

ATSA launched in October 1995 and, to date, have used 2 private employment agencies, as follows:

Agency	*Number of employed*	*Total cost £*	*Contract length*
October 1995 to March 1996			
Job Spot	1	2,800	8 weeks
April 1996 to February 1997			
Job Spot	1	23,500	44 weeks
List Design Group	1	7,800	20 weeks

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

Your recent question asked for information about private employment agencies used by the Ministry of Defence and its Agencies including numbers of staff employed from employment agencies, the cost of staff thus employed and the cost paid to the agency and contract duration. I am replying on behalf of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

I am afraid that this information is not held centrally in DERA as all our business sectors are empowered to recruit their own staff. The information you request could therefore only be collected at disproportionate cost.

All recruitment of permanent staff in DERA is through fair and open competition in accordance with Civil Service procedures. Where private employment agencies are used it is either to complement other methods of advertising for staff or to meet short term temporary requirements.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful on this occasion.

Letter from T. McG. Brown to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt. Hon Michael Portillo MP, regarding the use of private employment agencies within the MOD. As Chief Executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Services Agency (DPCSA) I am responsible for recruitment and employment of staff within my Agency and I am therefore providing the details you have requested in respect of my Agency.

The four employment agencies shown below have supplied temporary staff to DPCSA during the period from 1st January 1994 to 31st December 1996. The total number of staff used from each agency during this period, the average length of contract, the cost per hour (inclusive of VAT) and the type of employee supplied is also shown.

	Number supplied	*Contract period*	*Cost (£/hour)*	*Employee type*
Bond Accountancy	1	3 months	20	Accountant
Hays Accountancy Personnel	1	5 months	25	Accountant
Manpower plc	32	4 days	7–8	Drivers
Josephine Sammons Limited	10	4 months	7–8	Clerical staff

The overall cost of using these staff is not separately identified. However most of these staff were used during 1996/97 and current expenditure on temporary staff is approximately £45,000 per year. The overall cost of employing temporary staff is comparable with the cost of equivalent permanent staff.

The agencies listed above are used to recruit temporary staff on a short term basis while permanent staff are being recruited. All permanent staff are recruited from other areas of the MOD or directly by DPCSA via press advertisements, which are also sent to local Job Centres. No permanent staff are recruited from private employment agencies.

I hope this information is helpful.

Letter from Ron Smith to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies by Defence Agencies as this matter, in respect of the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DSCA), falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the DSCA.

I regret, that the information requested, is not held in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Letter from Alan Bush to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence, about the use of private employment agencies, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Acting Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Executive Agency (DTMX).

A private employment agency has been used only once by DTMX in the last 3 years. We employed the Recruitment and Assessment Services, Basingstoke, at a total cost of £14,822, to engage direct from Industry the Commercial Business Adviser to DTMX. The individual concerned is employed on a contract of 2 years duration.

Letter from Malcolm Westgate to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies. This matter falls to me as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

My organisation acquired Agency status in October 1994. The information you seek is given below, for the period October 1994 to December 1996.

1. Names of agencies used, and numbers employed by each agency in each year.

	1994	*1995*	*1996*
Josephine Sammons	3	3	4
Manpower Services	1	1	0
Alfred Marks Western Systems	1	1	1

2. Cost of using employment agencies.

1994: £14,414.67

1995: £47,743.20

1996: £35,278.96

3. The median cost per person recruited was £264.

4. The length of the contracts ranged from 2 weeks to 2 years. The average length was 8 months.

Letter from John Clarke to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

You recently asked the Secretary of State for Defence a Parliamentary Question relating to the use by the MOD and its Agencies of private employment agencies in each of the last 3 years. As this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office I have been asked to reply to you.

No private employment agencies were used in the years 1994 and 1995. On 1st April 1996 the UK Hydrographic Agency became a Trading Fund Agency solely reliant for its funding on revenue from the sale of its products and services. It was therefore necessary to build up very rapidly a more commercial awareness in the Agency and for that reason a number of Interim Managers were employed through private employment agencies. In addition, one agency supplied a temporary employee to cover for short term absence. Details of these are:

Agency name	*Numbers employed*	*Median cost per person recruited £*
Ashton Penney	3	58,044
Barton Interim Management	1	92,277
Parity Solutions	1	12,740
Eurolink Group plc	1	9,800
Western Staff Services	1	472.11
Harrison Willis Ltd.	1	26,892.53

The total cost to the UK Hydrographic Agency of using employment agencies in 1996 was £316,315.64p. This amount included charges in respect of salaries paid to the recruits by the agencies but does not include VAT. The average length of contract was 19.4 weeks

I hope this information has been helpful.

Letter from Gordon Wilson to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the use of private employment agencies.

The information you require in respect of this Agency is as follows:

Agency	*Numbers employed*	*Cost £*	*Average cost per employee*	*Average length of contract*
1993–94				
ACE				
Recruitment	1	2,375	2,375	15 weeks
BNA	1	553	553	2 weeks
CMS Employment	1	825	825	6 weeks
Barclays Comm Svcs	1	1,795	1,795	12 weeks
		5,548		
1994–95				
BNA	1	1,314	1,314	5 weeks
CMS Employment	1	1,361	1,361	12 weeks
Byers Exec Svcs	1	288	288	2 weeks
Night Force	1	141	141	2 days
		3,104		
1995–96				
BNA	1	8,295	8,295	22 weeks
Night Force	1	183	183	2 days
		8,478		

Letter from Alan Pollard to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about use of private employment agencies. As Chief Executive, this falls within my area of responsibility for the Logistic Information Systems Agency (LISA).

The Agency was formed in November 1994 and assumed full responsibility for personnel recruitment in April 1996. During 1996, the Agency incurred expenditure of £830.76 + VAT to the Paterson Recruitment Agency of Bicester in recruiting one Administrative Assistant on a permanent basis. In recent weeks I have authorised expenditure amounting to £33763.62 to the Recruitment & Assessment Services for the coordination of a campaign to recruit up to 60 Higher Executive Officers and Executive Officers on a permanent basis. The recruitment process is ongoing with results yet to be promulgated.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Letter from Stephen Campion to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies as this matter falls within the area of responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Medical Supplies Agency, who is currently away from the office on official duties.

The answers to your questions are that since the Agency was established in March 1996:

(a) No permanent staff have been recruited through private employment services.

(b) A total of 4 industrial and 6 non-industrial casual staff have been recruited through one private agency.

(c) The costs of (b) above are £82,586.47 with the median cost paid to the agency being approximately £8,300.

(d) The average casual/temporary contract for these staff is 3 months (industrial) and 6 months (non-industrial).

Letter from Philip Wildman to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Military Survey Agency.

The breakdown of the employment agencies and the costs are below. The median cost paid to each agency per person recruited in 1996–97 is £31,480 with an average length of contract of one year.

Ser	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	Numbers 1996–97
1.	Reed Staffing	Reed Staffing	Reed Staffing	3.5
2.		[1]MTS	[1]MTS	
3.		[1]Forward Recruitment Corporate Services	[1]Forward Recruitment Corporate Services	50
4.	Corporate Services Group	Group Manpower plc	Group Manpower plc	
5.				1
6.	F I Recruitment			1
7.	Alfred Marks			
8.	Pertemp			
9.	£623,460	£673,230	£699,596	55.5

[1] MTS, Forward Recruitment and Corporate Services Group are now one company. Figures include part-time contract staff.

Letter from Walter Boreham to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about private employment agencies, as this falls into my area of responsibility as Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency.

During the last three financial years I have used Belle Personnel, Key Personnel, Manpower Plc and Josephine Salmons employment agencies, who provided a total of 8 persons, at a cost of some £51,000.

I do not use the services of employment agencies to recruit permanent staff but rather to provide personnel to fill short term vacancies.

Letter from John McAnally to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question, about the use of employment agencies in each of the past three years, in my capacity as Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA).

I am afraid that it is not possible to provide you with the information in the format requested. The NRTA was created from the Flag Officer Training and Recruiting (FOTR) Command area on 1 April 1995 and, therefore, has not been in existence for three years, however, the following information has been compiled from the combined FOTR and NRTA use of employment agencies since 1994:

(a) Agencies Used:

South Hams Nursing Agency

Crown Nursing Agency

Personnel Selection

Primary Management

Alfred Marks

AYS Recruitment Agency

Manpower plc

Office Angels

(b) Total Number of Personnel Employed: 92

(c) Total Cost: £172,908 (Median Cost Per Person: £407.17)

(d) Average Length of Contract: 1½ months.

You may be interested to note that, wherever possible, a competitive tendering process is used to identify the most cost-effective employment agency. In cases where there may be an ongoing requirement for agency personnel (e.g., Nurses), the negotiation of a longer term contract (say, for three years) is likely to result in more competitive prices than would be the case in ad hoc arrangements.

I hope that this is helpful.

Letter from A. J. Stables to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency. The names of the agencies which have ben used are as follows:

Alfred Marks

Anaesthetists Agency

Angela Shaw Associates

Beaver Employment

Blue Arrow Catering Services

Brook Street Bureau plc

Defcon Security Services

Gibson Oliff Recruitment

Hamlin Nursing Agency

Hayes Accountancy Personnel

Jenrick Ltd.

Pertemps

Toner Graham

Travail

The total number of private agency staff employed over the last 3 years was 109; 29 of them were employed during financial year 1994–95, 32 in 1995–96 and 48 in 1996–97. The costs during these years were approximately £102K, £132.5K and £147.7K respectively; a total of £382.2K over the period. The median cost paid to the agencies per employee was approximately £3.5K. As far as can be determined from the information available, the average length of contract per person was just over 7.5 weeks.

I am sending a copy of this letter to my Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.

Letter from Roger Babington to Mr. Mike Hall, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying in part to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the use of private employment agencies, as this is related to my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency.

The Ships Support Agency was launched on 11 December 1996 and since that time has used two employment agencies, the details of which are provided below:

1.

(a) Ross Campbell Consultants Limited

(b) Two people employed

(c) Total cost £3,552, cost per employee £1,776

(d) Average contract length of employees ten months

2.

(a) Alfred Marks (At Your Service)

(b) Three people employed

(c) Total cost £8,086, cost per employee £2,695

(d) Average contract length of employees 5.5 months

(The cost per employee is the exact cost to the Department and not the median).

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16287]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The assessment and recording of hazardous substances used in construction is covered by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1995. The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994 requires information regarding any hazardous materials incorporated within the fabric of any new structure to be recorded in the health and safety file for that structure.

The presence of any hazardous materials, such as asbestos, in existing buildings is recorded in the appropriate register its location is noted and its condition monitored.

Measures are in place to restrict the use of ozone-depleting substances in the construction of MOD buildings.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 20 February 1997

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department had made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16311]

Mr. Boswell: The Department is responsible for carrying out risk assessments under, among other things, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994, the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987 and the Control of Asbestos at Work (Amendment) Regulations 1992. All buildings have an asbestos register where its presence has been identified. As far as ozone depleting chemicals are concerned, surveys of fire fighting and cooling equipment have been carried out and the use of these substances has either ceased or is in the process of being phased out.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of *(a)* energy use and *(b)* waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16421]

Mr. Boswell: Environmental assessments are carried out for all new buildings and major refurbishment of existing buildings under the Building Research Establishment's environmental assessment method—BREEAM. These include energy use and waste management.

As a result of energy surveys and auditing through a computerised database, a programme of energy efficient schemes has been initiated.

Under our action plan for green housekeeping, there is a requirement on all our sites to minimise the generation of waste and implement recycling schemes. A series of formal audits of laboratories is planned for 1997–98.

Mink Farms

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many mink fur farms there are in England by county. [16406]

Mrs. Browning: At 17 February 1997, there were the following mink farms in England:

County	*Number of licensed mink farms*
Cornwall	1
Dorset	1
Hampshire	1
Isle of Wight	1
Lancashire	5
Northumberland	1
Staffordshire	1
West Yorkshire	2
Total	13

Hens

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will introduce measures requiring pop-holes in housing associated with free-range poultry systems to be a minimum of 30 cm high and 75 cm wide; [16520]

(2) if he will ensure that laying hens in colony systems have their beaks trimmed only for therapeutic purposes; [16510]

(3) if he will ensure that sufficient pop-holes are provided in free-range poultry systems to allow all birds easy access into and out of the house; [16512]

(4) if he will require that perching space of at least 18 cm per hen is provided in colony systems; [16514]

(5) if he will ensure that the stocking rate of laying hens in colony systems does not exceed *(a)* seven hens per square metre of floor plan area in single-tier systems and *(b)* 15.5 hens in multi-tier systems; [16516]

(6) if he will introduce maximum flock size in a laying hen colony system of 2,000; [16511]

(7) if he will ensure that hens in free-range systems are not stocked in any one paddock at more than 1,000 hens per hectare under a rotational management system; [16513]

(8) if he will ensure that sufficient nest boxes are to be provided for laying hens in colony systems to permit access for all hens. [16517]

Mrs. Browning: These questions concern the implementation of recommendations in the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of laying hens in colony systems.

As our detailed response to that report made clear, there is no overall benefit to farm animal welfare in introducing unilateral legislation where this would disadvantage our own producers while continuing to allow imports produced in systems with lower welfare standards. We have instead worked with our European partners to develop a new Council of Europe recommendation on the welfare of domestic fowl and will continue to press the European Commission to bring forward its overdue proposals for a directive laying down new or revised Community standards for laying hens.

Our input into the forthcoming negotiations will be underpinned by our extensive programme of research into farm animal welfare and informed by the recommendations in the existing report and by the outcome of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's current review of the welfare of laying hens in all types of system.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that *(a)* hens in colony systems and *(b)* broiler chicken flocks are required to be inspected at least twice each day by those in charge of the units. [16763]

Mrs. Browning: This question concerns the implementation of recommendations in the Farm Animal Welfare Council's reports on the welfare of laying hens in colony systems and the welfare of broiler chickens.

As our detailed responses to these reports made clear, we accept that twice daily inspection makes good management practice. This will be reflected in our input into forthcoming negotiations on new Community standards for laying hens and nationally in the new welfare code for broilers which is currently in preparation.

Sheep

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will ensure that embryotomy is carried out only on dead lambs; [16504]

(2) if he will ensure that only qualified veterinary surgeons trained in the technique carry out trans-cervical artificial insemination in sheep; [16503]

(3) if he will prohibit combined castration and tail docking of lambs less than 24 hours old. [16507]

Mrs. Browning: The Government response to the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of sheep made it clear that we agree with these points. We intend to address them in the revised welfare code on sheep which is currently in preparation.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will ensure that tail docking of lambs over the age of six weeks is carried out only by a veterinary surgeon for therapeutic purposes under anaesthetic; [16506]

(2) if he will ensure that surgical castration of lambs is performed only when the lambs are under anaesthetic by a veterinary surgeon. [16505]

Mrs. Browning: We made it clear in our detailed response to the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of sheep that, in the absence of conclusive scientific evidence as to the best way forward, we thought it inappropriate to make changes to current legislation on tail docking and castration. We are funding further research and will review the position in the light of the results.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many holdings on which sheep are kept in England and Wales are registered with MAFF; and how many of those have been allocated with a flockmark in accordance with article 3 of the Sheep and Goats (Identification, Movement and Records) Order 1996. [16687]

Mrs. Browning: A total of 70,742 holdings on which sheep are kept in England and Wales have been registered with MAFF under the terms of article 3 of the Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1996. They have all been allocated with a flock mark.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many consignments of sheep for slaughter have been exported from the United Kingdom to the Republic of Ireland since 1 January; and in each case which ferry route was declared in the journey plan. [16684]

Mrs. Browning: Since 1 January 1997 there have been two consignments of sheep exported from Britain to the Irish Republic for slaughter. The transporter declared that the Cairnryan to Larne ferry crossing would be used.

Broiler Chickens

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will introduce a maximum stocking density for broiler chickens; [16508]

(2) if he will require farmers to keep records of stocking densities of broiler chickens; [16509]

(3) if he will require the internal floor area available to each bird in a broiler chicken house to be clearly and permanently displayed at the entrance to the house. [16515]

Mrs. Browning: These questions concern the implementation of recommendations in the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of broiler chickens.

As our detailed response to that report made clear, there is no overall benefit to farm animal welfare in introducing unilateral legislation where this would disadvantage our own producers while continuing to allow imports produced in systems with lower welfare standards. We have instead worked with our European partners to develop the new Council of Europe recommendation on the welfare of domestic fowl. This was adopted in 1995 and will serve in due course as the basis for EU legislation.

In addition to implementing many of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's recommendations, the new welfare code for broilers, which is currently in preparation, will take the new Council of Europe requirements into account.

Carcases (Labelling)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will require that carcases and cuts from animals slaughtered by religious methods be clearly labelled at the point of sale. [16518]

Mrs. Browning: Following a comprehensive review of labelling issues in 1990, the Food Advisory Committee recommended that there should be no statutory requirement to provide information about slaughtering methods. The Government accepted this advice and have no plans to reconsider the issue. Such information may be provided voluntarily if it is true and not misleading.

Animal Slaughter

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ensure the legal exemption from pre-stunning livestock before slaughter is withdrawn in respect of animals slaughtered for religious purposes. [16519]

Mrs. Browning: The Government have no plans to withdraw this exemption which recognises a fundamental matter of religious belief to communities that are an important part of our national life.

Badgers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his plans in respect of badger removal programmes. [16685]

Mrs. Browning: Professor Krebs and his committee are conducting an independent review of the scientific evidence relating to badgers and tuberculosis in cattle. It would be inappropriate to consider changes to the current policy until Professor Krebs has reported.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* current reported outbreaks of bovine tuberculosis and *(b)* current and proposed badger removal programmes in Gloucester. [16686]

Mrs. Browning: There are currently 37 herds in Gloucestershire under movement restrictions due to bovine TB. There are 13 badger removal operations in progress. A further seven badger removal operations have been approved and investigatory work has commenced on three of these.

European Commission Inspection Report

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a copy of the report received by him from the European Commission following a visit from an inspector from the Commission between 4 to 7 November 1996. [16688]

Mrs. Browning: A report from the European Commission has not been received.

Rabies

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *321*, what plans he has to consult the British Veterinary Association on possible changes to the United Kingdom's rabies control arrangements when his Department's consideration of the matter has been concluded. [16846]

Mrs. Browning: Should the review conclude that alternative options to quarantine are available, the views of the British Veterinary Association would be sought.

Livestock Transport Adviser

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what qualifications were required in the appointment of a livestock transport adviser; when this position was first established; and if he will list the names, qualifications and experience of each holder of the post. [16689]

Mrs. Browning: I will write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Quarantine

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many owners of quarantine kennels have agreed to abide by the voluntary code of practice on welfare standards in quarantine premises; and how many of those premises have been inspected by the state veterinary service to date. [16690]

Mrs. Browning: Seventy-one owners of quarantine premises have agreed to abide by the voluntary code of practice. Of these, 59 have been inspected by the State Veterinary Service to date.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the inspections by the state veterinary service of quarantine premises that agree to abide by the voluntary code of practice on welfare standards to be completed. [16692]

Mrs. Browning: The majority of inspections by the State Veterinary Service to ensure compliance with the voluntary code of practice have been carried out. But the programme will not be completed as early as originally planned due to the urgency of work connected with the outbreaks of Newcastle disease and the BSE accelerated cull programme. It will be completed as soon as possible.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many quarantine premises have *(a)* indicated that they will not comply and *(b)* have not yet responded to the Minister's invitation to comply with the voluntary code of practice on welfare standards. [16693]

Mrs. Browning: Four quarantine premises have indicated that they do not wish to comply with the voluntary code of practice at this stage. Two have not yet responded to the invitation.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ports and airports through which cats and dogs may be imported into the United Kingdom have facilities for holding animals prior to them being taken into quarantine. [16694]

Mrs. Browning: Five ports and nine airports.

Challenge for Agriculture Programme

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in implementing the challenge for agriculture programme in English objective 5b areas. [17476]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Six areas in England are designated for support under objective 5b of the EC structural funds. They are:

The South West—Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and parts of Devon and Somerset;

The Marches—most of Shropshire and parts of Hereford and Worcester;

The Northern uplands—parts of Lancashire, parts of north and east Yorkshire, Durham, Cumbria and Northumberland;

Lincolnshire—Most of northern and eastern Lincolnshire, excluding the city of Lincoln and other mainly urban areas;

East Anglia—the Fens, rural Norfolk, Lowestoft and rural east Suffolk; and

Midland uplands—Peak district of Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

The challenge for agriculture programme is formed of those elements of the objective 5b programmes which are part-financed by the guidance section of the European agriculture guidance and guarantee fund—EAGGF. The programme also attracts national public funding, mainly from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and levers in substantial amounts of private sector funding to support the investments that it encourages.

Assistance is available for a wide range of farm-related activities that will promote economic development in the objective 5b areas, in particular, farm tourism, agricultural and horticultural development and diversification, protection and enhancement of the environment, generation of energy from alternative sources by the agricultural industry and the promotion and marketing of local and regional products.

The first EAGGF projects under the challenge for agriculture programme in England were approved in March 1995. In the two years since then, a total of 144 projects have already been approved across the six designated areas with EAGGF grant of £13 million and MAFF grant of £10 million committed to them. As these projects are implemented, they will lead to the eventual total investment of almost £50 million in the objective 5b areas concerned. Projects supported to date vary from small schemes to develop and promote local meat production to multi-million pound projects promoting farm tourism, offering business support to farmers and protecting the environment.

I am particularly pleased with the interest shown to date in the challenge for agriculture programme across the agricultural sector and expect that many more worthwhile projects will come forward for funding before the end of this programme in 1999. It demonstrates MAFF's commitment to the rural economy, with sound and sustainable economic benefit in the objective 5b areas concerned.

My ministerial colleagues and I maintain a close interest in the development of objective 5b and the challenge for agriculture programme and have previously visited a number of projects which have been approved and are in receipt of funding. Further such visits are planned for 21 February to projects in the northern uplands, the south-west, the Marches and Lincolnshire objective 5b areas.

A list of the challenge for agriculture projects approved to date in each of the six English objective 5b areas has been placed in the Library of the House.

Cattle Cull

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated cost of the disposal per tonne of cattle carcases *(a)* by incineration, *(b)* by landfill and *(c)* by other means. [10342]

Mr. Baldry *[pursuant to his reply, 16 January 1997]:* The cost of rendering and incinerating meat and bonemeal and tallow derived from cattle carcases is around £215 per tonne.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the minimum age requirements enforced by her Department. [15912]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Education and Employment is not in general responsible for enforcing age requirements. However, age requirements do apply to certain education, training and employment measures, including the following:

Children must be aged four to be eligible for the nursery voucher scheme.

The majority of places offered under the assisted places scheme begin at age 11. From September 1996, places are now available for the first time for primary age children as young as five. Assisted sixth form places are also available.

Current regulations require pupils to remain at school until one of two dates: for pupils whose birthday falls between 1 September to 31 January, it is the end of the spring term—that is, the Easter holidays—following their 16th birthday; for those whose 16th birthday falls between 1 February to 31 August, it is the Friday before the last Monday in May. The only exception to the above is for those children who have not been registered at a school at any time during the year preceding their 16 birthday. For these children, the upper limit of compulsory school age is their 16 birthday.

For programmes covered by the training and enterprise councils operating agreement, and other associated contractual documentation:

young people have to have reached the minimum school leaving age (as above) before they can join youth programmes;

people need to be 18 before they are eligible for training for work;

pupils are eligible to take part in work experience if they are in the last term of year 10 or year 11;

children of school age are eligible to use the child care services provided by the out-of school childcare grant.

To receive income-based jobseeker's allowance, claimants must have reached the age of 18; 16 and 17-year-olds may receive JSA however, if they are in circumstances prescribed in the Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996—regulations 59, 60 and 61—or if the Secretary of State decides they would suffer severe hardship unless an allowance was paid. In either case, 16 and 17-year-olds must meet the basic requirement conditions for JSA.

The teachers' superannuation regulations impose minimum age requirements in four areas:

membership of the scheme—age 18;

purchase of added years—age 20;

retirement on age grounds—age 60;

premature retirement—age 50.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the ways in which her Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an

environmental audit of waste management within those buildings her Department occupies; and if she will make a statement. [16429]

Mr. Robin Squire: Departmental waste management centres on internal monitoring of procedures; waste segregation and recycling—that is, white paper, newspaper, aluminium cans, cardboard, toner cartridges, redundant furniture and hazardous waste.

Castle View house, Runcorn is the only new building to come onto the Department's headquarters estate in recent years. Following its completion in 1992, a Building Research Establishment environmental assessment method was successfully completed in December 1993. DfEE HQ has set a waste minimisation target of 5 per cent. for the 1997–98 financial year. A cross-site working group has been set up to co-ordinate waste minimisation and encourage the use of the Environment Agency "DIY Environmental Checklist".

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *173*, when she intends to publish the results of the research carried out by the Employment Service occupational psychology division. [16682]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 20 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about when the results of the research carried out by the Employment Service Occupational Psychology Division will be published. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

My predecessor, Mike Fogden, said in his letter of 26 November that Occupational Psychology Division were considering their findings and a report would be published in due course. In considering those findings we identified the need to examine in more detail aspects of the help we offer former Incapacity Benefit claimants. We have now decided that it would be more practical and useful to publish that further work, once completed, alongside the original work as a single package. I anticipate publication in late Spring. As Mr. Fogden promised in his earlier letter I will ensure that a copy is sent to you and that one is placed in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobfinder's Grant

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her latest estimate of the numbers of *(a)* severe disablement allowance, *(b)* incapacity benefit and *(c)* income support claimants who would gain if eligibility for the jobfinder's grant were extended to people in receipt of those benefits at the time of their application. [16673]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 20 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about possible take-up of the Jobfinder's Grant by claimants in receipt of Severe Disablement Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Income Support. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I understand from the Department of Social Security that the current number of claimants in each of the three groups are approximately as follows: Severe Disablement Allowance—331,000; Incapacity Benefit 1,541,000 and Income Support—2,059,000. Some people may be claiming more than one of these benefits.

We do not know what the take-up of the Jobfinder's Grant amongst these groups would be if it was made available. For jobseekers who have been registered unemployed for two years or more it is about 6%, but we would expect it to be lower for these other groups of claimants, perhaps in the order of 2%, giving a possible take-up of around 80,000.

I hope this is helpful.

Student Loans

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many students registered in the *(a)* first, *(b)* second, *(c)* third and *(d)* fourth years of (i) a university and (ii) a college course applied for a student loan between 1990 and 1996; [16522]

(2) how many students registered in graduate studies applied for a student loan between 1990 and 1996; [16523]

(3) what was the percentage of defaults on student loan repayments between 1990 and 1996. [16524]

Mr. Forth: These are matters for the Student Loans Company. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the information requested.

Education Vouchers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to pilot a voucher scheme for education at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary levels. [16598]

Mr. Robin Squire: None.

Free School Meals

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list, for each education authority in England, *(a)* the number and percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals for each year since 1992 and *(b)* the spending on school meals in the same period. [16770]

Mrs. Gillan: As the available information is lengthy, I have arranged for it to be placed in the Library.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what amount of the total budget allocated to training and enterprise councils was subsequently allocated to training providers in the most recent year for which figures are available. [16776]

Mr. Paice: Government contracts with TECs for a range of activity as set out in TEC business plans. We do not collect detailed information on TEC payments to training providers.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what monitoring takes place by her Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16760]

Mr. Robin Squire: Non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department for Education and Employment operate within the terms of financial memoranda agreed with the Department.

These require NDPBs to establish an internal audit service whose role is to provide assurance on the control arrangements to the accounting officer of the NDPB. This assurance is provided through the implementation of a risk-based audit plan.

Each plan identifies a cyclical programme of reviews designed, over time, to subject the full range of running cost expenditure to system audit. This process reviews those systems that control the use of external consultants. The frequency and depth of review would depend on the perceived degree of "risk" of the various arrangements within the particular organisation.

The Department's own internal audit division ensures that the overall service provided by the internal audit provider to the NDPB is of appropriate quality.

Additionally, NDPBs are aware of the Cabinet Office report on the Government's use of external consultants and have been given copies of the Department's guidance on best practice in the use of external consultants.

Employment Service

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will place in the Library a copy of the Ernst and Young study into the Employment Service headquarters structure. [16772]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 20 February 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on whether a copy of the Ernst and Young study of the Employment Service Headquarters will be placed in the Library of the House. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

You may find it helpful if I give you some background to the work. The Employment Service (ES) commissioned the consultants Ernst and Young to help the ES Board think through issues concerning the future role of our Headquarters (Head Office and Regional Offices) and to develop an overview of the type of Headquarters the Agency would need. We accomplished this through a series of workshops of ES Board members and senior managers, facilitated by the consultants, who provided advice and fact-finding based on their work in organisations elsewhere. Our aim is now to draw on that work to inform more detailed change projects over the next three years.

Because of the way in which the consultants worked with the ES Board there is no formal consultants' report from the Headquarters Review project, but my predecessor, Mike Fogden, wrote to all staff in Headquarters on 31 October last year summarising the ES Board's main conclusions. I set out the key strands of our thinking and proposals for further work from that communication below.

ES's field operations have previously been subject to rigorous examination of need, effectiveness and cost. The Agency has become smaller as unemployment has fallen and it is now appropriate to apply a similar approach to our Headquarters functions.

Our examination concluded that the ES could be managed better and more cost effectively by eliminating duplication of functions between Head and Regional Offices which lead to reworking and loss of economies of scale; improving our Headquarter business processes; and contracting out some support functions.

This has led us to develop a blueprint for ES Headquarters of a small directing and enabling Head Office and a regional management tier focusing on the delivery of services to our clients.

To realise this, we have commissioned more detailed work to reduce HQ activities in areas not directly related to delivery of services to our clients; rebrigade (possibly to single sites) a number of support functions, and actively explore the scope for contracting out a number of support functions.

I think it worth adding that this is essentially a management issue rather than a policy one and the changes we are proposing will not affect our services to jobseekers and employers through Jobcentres – indeed we aim by focussing our Headquarters more directly on the core business of the ES to improve the services we provide through our Jobcentre network.

I hope this is helpful in giving more information on what we are seeking to achieve.

European Social Fund

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice has been issued to sector managers about the effect of exchange rate changes between the pound and the ecu on 1996 approvals for European social fund moneys; by how much allocations are to be reduced in total; and if she will make a statement. [16774]

Mr. Paice: For the objective 3 programme of the European social fund, it is currently estimated that there will be enough sterling to meet claims for existing projects approved by the Department's European social fund unit in 1996. The monitoring committee responsible for overall management of the objective 3 programme in Great Britain will make the final decision as to what extent further projects should be approved. When it has reached a conclusion on this, the Department will issue appropriate advice to sector managers.

ENVIRONMENT

Brent Spar

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of correspondence between his Department and other bodies regarding the process or content of discussions to dispose of the Brent Spar, as set out in the papers listed as Brent Spar papers 1 to 24, placed in the Library by his Department. [15650]

Mr. Clappison: Since my Department has no statutory powers to exercise in this field, it had no correspondence of the kind contained in the Brent Spar papers 1 to 24 placed in the Library by the Department of Trade and Industry, except that, as one of the UK co-ordinating points for the Oslo and Paris commissions, it received a

copy of the letter of 17 February 1995 from the secretariat of those commissions, which forms No. 18 of those papers.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment at what stage and on what date his Department was first consulted by the Department of Trade and Industry about Shell's wish to dispose of the Brent Spar at sea; and if he will place in the Library copies of the correspondence between the two Departments on this matter. [15651]

Mr. Clappison: Discussions were held between Departments at various levels and in various contexts. My Department was involved from at least February 1994. It is not the normal practice to publish material passing between Government Departments in the course of preparing advice for Ministers.

Energy Conservation

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the energy conservation authorities which did not submit their first reports to the Secretary of State under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 *(a)* by 30 November 1996, *(b)* by 31 December 1996, *(c)* by 31 January 1997 and *(d)* to date. [15883]

Mr. Clappison: The energy conservation authorities whose reports were not received by the dates referred to are in the following list:

(a) not received by 30 November 1996

Adur District Council
Allerdale Borough Council
Alnwick District Council
Ashford Borough Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Barrow in Furness Borough Council
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Bath and North East Somerset Council
Berwick upon Tweed District Council
Blackpool Borough Council
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Borough of Blackburn
Borough of Crewe and Nantwich
Borough of Macclesfield
Boston Borough Council
Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council
Brent Council
Bridgnorth District Council
Brighton Borough Council
Bristol City Council
Broadland District Council
Burnley Borough Council
Cannock Chase Council
Canterbury City Council
Carlisle City Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Chester City Council
Chorley Borough Council
Christchurch Borough Council
City of Durham
City of London
City of Newcastle upon Tyne
City of Plymouth
City of Salford
City of Stoke on Trent
City of Worcester
Colchester Borough Council
Congleton Borough Council
Copeland Borough Council
Cotswold Borough Council
Craven District Council
Crawley Borough Council
Dartford Borough Council
Derwentside District Council
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
Dover District Council
Eastbourne Borough Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
East Dorset District Council
East Northamptonshire Council
Eden District Council
Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council
Fenland District Council
Forest of Dean District Council
Fylde Borough Council
Gillingham Borough Council
Gosport Borough Council
Gravesham Borough Council
Guildford Borough Council
Halton Borough Council
Hambleton District Council
Harborough District Council
Harrogate Borough Council
Hartlepool Borough Council
Hereford City Council
Horsham District Council
Hove Borough Council
Hyndburn District Council
Isle of Wight Council
Islington Council
Kerrier District Council
Lancaster City Council
Lichfield District Council
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
London Borough of Barnet
London Borough of Bexley
London Borough of Camden
London Borough of Croydon
London Borough of Ealing
London Borough of Enfield
London Borough of Hackney
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
London Borough of Haringey
London Borough of Harrow
London Borough of Havering
London Borough of Hillingdon
London Borough of Hounslow
London Borough of Lambeth
London Borough of Merton

London Borough of Redbridge
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
London Borough of Sutton
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
London Borough of Waltham Forest
London Borough of Wandsworth
Maidstone Borough Council
Maldon District Council
Manchester City Council
Mendip District Council
Mid Devon District Council
Milton Keynes Borough Council
Mole Valley District Council
Newbury District Council
Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council
New Forest District Council
Newham Council
North Cornwall District Council
North Devon District Council
North Dorset District Council
North Tyneside District Council
North Warwickshire Borough Council
North Somerset Council
North Wiltshire District Council
Pendle Borough Council
Penworth District Council
Portsmouth City Council
Preston Borough Council
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
Redditch Borough Council
Restormel Borough Council
Ribble Valley Borough Council
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Rossendale Borough Council
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Rushmoor Borough Council
Ryedale District Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Sedgefield Borough Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Sheffield City Council
Shepway District Council
Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council
Slough Borough Council
South Gloucestershire Council
South Herefordshire District Council
South Lakeland District Council
South Northamptonshire Council
South Ribble Borough Council
South Staffordshire District Council
South Somerset District Council
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
Southwark Council
Spelthorne Borough Council
Stafford Borough Council
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
St. Edmundsbury Borough Council
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Swale Borough Council
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Tandridge District Council
Teesdale District Council
Teignbridge District Council
Test Valley Borough Council
Tewkesbury Borough Council
Thamesdown Borough Council
Thanet District Council
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Torbay Borough Council
Torridge District Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Vale Royal Borough Council
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Wansbeck District Council
Warrington Borough Council
Warwick District Council
Waverley Borough Council
Wealden District Council
Wear Valley District Council
Wellingborough Borough Council
West Dorset District Council
West Wiltshire District Council
West Lancashire District Council
Westminster City Council
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
Winchester City Council
Wokingham District Council
Wolverhampton Council
Worthing Borough Council
Wychavon District Council
Wycombe District Council
Wyre Borough Council.

(b) not received by 31 December 1996
Allerdale Borough Council
Alnwick District Council
Berwick upon Tweed District Council
Broadland District Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Colchester Borough Council
Cotswold District Council
Dartford Borough Council
East Dorset District Council
Fenland District Council
Fylde Borough Council
Gillingham Borough Council
Gosport Borough Council
Harborough District Council
Mole Valley District Council
North Devon District Council
North Somerset Council

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Sevenoaks District Council
South Ribble Borough Council
South Staffordshire District Council
Spelthorne Borough Council
Teesdale District Council
Warwick District Council
Waverley Borough Council
Wellingborough Borough Council
West Wiltshire District Council
Wyre Borough Council

(c) not received by 31 January 1997
Allerdale Borough Council
Alnwick District Council
Berwick upon Tweed District Council
Fenland District Council
Gosport Borough Council
South Staffordshire District Council
Wellingborough Borough Council.

(d) not received to date (13 February 1997)
Allerdale Borough Council
Alnwick District Council
Berwick upon Tweed District Council
Fenland District Council
South Staffordshire District Council
Wellingborough Borough Council.

Migratory Song Birds

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account his Department takes of measures taken by applicant countries to the EU to deter the killing of migratory song birds in determining its policy towards their application. [15793]

Mr. Clappison: Wild birds in the European Union are protected by the provisions of the EC wild birds directive, 79/409/EEC. My Department would expect any new countries who acceded to the EU to abide by the provisions set out in that directive.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make representations to the Government of Cyprus regarding the killing of migratory song birds by hunters; and if he will make a statement. [15795]

Mr. Clappison: Bird protection measures in Cyprus are the responsibility of the Cypriot Government. The British Government are limited in what they can ask of other countries regarding their own legislation.

Water and Sewerage Companies

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the indicative values of the water, and water and sewerage companies used to calculate rates of return for the period 1989 to 1994. [16233]

Mr. Clappison: The indicative values of individual companies formed part of the financial projections which underlay the initial setting of price limits for each company. These financial projections are commercially confidential.

Tranquil Areas

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will map comprehensively the tranquil areas of England as defined by the Council for the Protection of Rural England; and what steps he is taking the preserve the tranquillity of those areas. [16227]

Mr. Clappison: We have no plans to map the tranquil areas of England. Ministers took great interest in the Council for the Protection of Rural England's tranquil area maps project and fully recognise the importance of areas of the countryside where people can go for peace and tranquillity. The Government's White Paper on rural England sets out our framework for maintaining a proper balance between development and protection across the whole of the countryside. The forthcoming revision of planning policy guidance note 7 will emphasise that a central tenet of sustainable development is the integration of development with protection of the environment.

Pollution (North Sea)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress made by the United Kingdom in meeting the targets set to reduce pollution in the North sea at the second North sea conference held in London in 1987. [16101]

Mr. Clappison: The second North sea conference in 1987 agreed to take measures to reduce urgently and drastically the total quantity of substances that are persistent, toxic and liable to bioaccumulate reaching the aquatic environment of the North sea via rivers and estuaries, with the aim of achieving a substantial reduction—of the order of 50 per cent.—in total inputs from these sources between 1985 and 1995.

As shown in the progress report to the fourth North sea conference, placed in the Library, the UK has achieved reductions of this order for "red list" substances, with the exception of zinc, where diffuse sources such as corrugated iron, cosmetics and car tyres have proved to be more significant than thought in 1987.

Student Accommodation

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many students in further and higher education he estimates were accommodated in the private rented sector in *(a)* 1987, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* the last year for which figures are available; and what assessment he has made of the growth in student accommodation since 1987. [16166]

Mr. Clappison: The number of students in the private rented sector estimated from the labour force survey are:

Thousands

	Full-time course	*Part-time course*
1987	260	80
1992	360	130
1996	470	180

Notes:
Students on full-time courses include those on sandwich courses and training in nursing.
Like all estimates based on sample surveys, these figures are subject to sampling variability.
There are no reliable figures on student accommodation yet provided by educational institutions.

Sheffield Development Corporation

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work of the Sheffield development corporation since its inception; and which organisation has been designated to continue its work. [16292]

Mr. Curry: As my hon. Friend will recall, recognition was given to the work of the Sheffield development corporation during the recent parliamentary debates on the winding up of the corporation—*Official Report, Second Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation*, 28 January 1997 and *Official Report, House of Lords* 6 February 1997 columns 1801–04. I fully endorse the views expressed by the Under-Secretary of State. It is clear that there is agreement on all sides that Sheffield development corporation has fulfilled its mission to bring economic regeneration to the lower Don valley and has made a most significant contribution to changing the image of Sheffield.

No single organisation has been designated to continue regeneration in Sheffield. The city council and British Waterways will bring to a conclusion a number of projects under way at the end of the corporation's lifetime. It is for the city council and other local partners to reach a conclusion on whether they wish to establish a single-purpose organisation to take regeneration forward. We have shown our commitment to partnership working in Sheffield by committing £124 million to projects in the city over the next seven years under the single regeneration budget challenge fund, capital challenge and estates renewal challenge fund.

Environmental Performance Checklist

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress with the Environment Agency's production of a DIY environmental performance checklist for premises managers on the Government estate. [16455]

Mr. Clappison: The checklist has been produced, and copies have been sent to green co-ordinators in Government Departments and to premises managers on the Government estate.

English House Condition Survey

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish *(a)* the main report of the 1996 English house condition survey and *(b)* the energy report of the 1996 English house condition survey. [16581]

Mr. Clappison: We expect to produce the main report of the 1996 EHCS before the end of this year and the energy report next year.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16576]

Sir Paul Beresford: No Ministers or officials from the Department of the Environment have attended a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee.

North of England Assembly

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the North of England Assembly to discuss regional government. [15287]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend has not met the North of England Assembly.

Social Housing

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are currently on waiting lists for social housing in *(a)* London, *(b)* England and *(c)* Coventry. [16552]

Mr. Clappison: Local authorities in England report the number of households on their housing waiting lists at 1 April each year in their annual housing investment programme returns. The latest available figures relate to the position on 1 April 1996, and are given in the 1996 "HIP 1 All Items Print", a copy of which is in the Library.

Corresponding data are not collected centrally for housing associations, some of which do not operate waiting lists.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16759]

Sir Paul Beresford: This is a matter for the management of the bodies concerned.

Homelessness

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for grants to homelessness voluntary organisations under section 180 of the Housing Act 1996. [17264]

Mr. Clappison: The successful grant programme established under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 will be continued under section 180 of the 1996 Act. The grant

programme has been particularly successful in helping single, homeless people to find and keep accommodation, and it continues to represent good value for money.

For 1997–98, the Government have made available £7.9 million to assist voluntary sector organisations to meet the running costs of practical projects which help single people in housing need. In addition to continuing to fund all eligible existing projects, we shall be inviting bids from voluntary organisations to set up new projects in 1997–98.

English Nature

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made on the financial, management and policy review of English Nature. [17265]

Mr. Clappison: The financial management and policy review of English Nature has been completed. The intention of the review was to see whether English Nature's system of internal control over both administrative and programme expenditure were reliable and effective. Today, the report was presented to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and to the chairman of English Nature, and I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

The review by my Department has made more than 50 recommendations. As a result of the review, there will be a major change in the relationship between the Department and English Nature, which will include the introduction of single running cost control, a revised financial memorandum, and a management statement.

Single running cost control is an annual cash limit for a non-departmental public body running costs which replaces more detailed item scrutiny. It enables a non-departmental public body to manage its own administration expenditure within that limit, subject to such overall constraints as Government policy on pay. The establishment of single running costs control emphasises that primary responsibility for both financial control and value for money rests with the non-departmental public body's own management.

For a non-departmental public body to be able to follow such an approach requires the support, encouragement and co-operation of its sponsoring Department. English Nature and the Department will work together to achieve this aim.

I consider all the recommendations important. Together, they constitute a package which will enable English Nature to continue to ensure that it is operating in an efficient and effective manner.

Water Conservation and Supply

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his response to the first report of the Environment Committee on water conservation and supply (HC 42, 1996–97) published on 20 November 1996. [17475]

Mr. Gummer: The Government have today published their response to the conclusions and recommendations of the Environment Committee's first report on water conservation and supply. We welcome the report, which broadly mirrors the views expressed in our own paper "*Water Resources and Supply: Agenda for Action*" which we published last October. In that, we set out a framework of policy and strategy to ensure that the water we need in the longer term is provided effectively, efficiently, and in an environmentally sustainable way.

The Government agree with the Committee that leakage reduction must be a top priority for the water companies in relation to water conservation, and notes a recent report from the Director General of Water Services that water companies' revised targets—which he may enforce—aim to reduce losses from their pipes in aggregate to around 15 per cent. of distribution input by the turn of the century. Moreover, the Government consider that it is sensible for water companies to offer their customers free or significantly discounted leakage detection and repair services for supply pipes, particularly where the supply system is stressed.

In 1996, the Government placed water companies under the statutory duty to promote the efficient use of water by their customers. The Director General of Water Services has reviewed companies' draft plans for doing this and is seeking improvements in some cases. As the Government pointed out in "*Water Resources and Supply: Agenda for Action*," and as the Committee states in its report, it is important for all organisations which are in a position to influence water usage by their employees or by the greater public to set an example, and for water consumers to be responsive.

In promoting water conservation, the Government will be bringing forward in 1998 new regulations to replace the existing water byelaws as a means of preventing wasteful use and undue consumption of water. Through their environmental technology best practice programme, the Government have already provided advice to industry and commerce on reducing water use and will be continuing their initiatives in this field. The Government provide advice to the agricultural sector on storage and efficient use of water, supported by research and development.

The Government share the Committee's concern about the impact of climate change on water resources and demand for water. The work of the Government's climate change impacts review group has focused attention on this issue, and has been made possible in large measure by continuing Government-funded research into climate prediction. The Government are encouraging water companies and the Environment Agency in taking full account of the implications of climate change scenarios for their duties. The Government note the private sector ability of the water companies, under the economic regulation of the Director General of Water Services, to put in place measures to strengthen supplies by making rapid improvements to the existing water supply system, and the investment of more than £400 million for that purpose since 1995.

Our response emphasises the role of water companies, their regulators, the wider water industry and water consumers in contributing to the sustainable management of water resources through water conservation. With the continuing dry weather over much of England and Wales, these issues must remain at the forefront of our attentions. The Government have been monitoring the water resources position since the onset of this dry period in the

spring of 1995. We have commissioned the Environment Agency to produce in March a report on the prospects for water supplies, based on the position at the end of February as the likely winter recharge period draws to a close, and on the actions water companies have in hand to fulfil their duty to maintain supplies.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change the 1996–97 external finance limits for the urban development corporations. [17478]

Mr. Gummer: Grant in aid to Teesside development corporation is being increased by £2,000,000 to allow it to bring forward regeneration projects. This will be funded by a transfer from city challenge. There will be an associated increase in the external financing limits for urban development corporations by £2,000,000 from £207,817,000 to 209,817,000.

PRIME MINISTER

Millennium Club

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister how many times over the last three years, he has addressed the Millennium Club in his official capacity; and if he will list the names of those present and the companies they represented on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [15696]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* None.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister what reports he has received on the offer made to prospective members of the Millennium Club by Mr. Alan Lewis, concerning access to Ministers of Her Majesty's Government and influence over Government policy; and if he will make a statement. [15661]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* None.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February. [15459]

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 February. [15460]

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16752]

The Prime Minister: For this purpose, my Department is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *13–14*.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Homes

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many housing associations registered in Scotland are registered with Scottish Homes; and how many of these have elected members of local authorities on the management boards or committees; [16595]

(2) when Scottish Homes expects the Irvine housing association to have drawn up and implemented new membership rules for the association; [16596]

(3) under what rules housing associations are obliged by Scottish Homes to operate in relation to their housing allocation systems; and if Scottish Homes has approved the current housing allocation system operated by the Irvine housing association; [16597]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The information requested relates to operational matters which are the responsibility of Scottish Homes. I have asked the chairman, Mr. John Ward, to write to the hon. Member with the relevant information.

Housing

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what remedy in law is available to Scottish local authorities seeking to improve the condition of a residential property under the ownership of an individual who is allowing it to fall into a state of disrepair; and what responsibilities and duties the different legislative provisions place on the local authority in relation to the property which is the subject of any action. [16599]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Building (Scotland) Act 1959, the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 give local authorities power in specified circumstances to serve notices on persons having control of houses which are in disrepair or likely soon to be so. The powers under the 1959 Act apply to houses or other buildings which are considered dangerous, those under the 1982 Act are commonly used to require repairs to the exterior of buildings in common ownership, and those under the 1987 Act apply to houses which are considered to be in a state of serious disrepair or are likely to deteriorate rapidly or to cause material damage to another house. In each of these cases, the notice will require the owner to take remedial action within a specified time; if it is not complied with the authority may carry out the works and recover the cost. Similar powers may be available also under local legislation.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to eliminate mixed-sex wards in Scottish national health service hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [16676]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no such proposals at present. However, during 1995, we instructed all trusts and health boards to review current practice in relation to mixed-sex accommodation and to draw up action plans to ensure that patients' concerns are addressed.

In addition, we introduced a new charter commitment from September 1996, so that all patients in Scotland receive prior notification of the type of accommodation in which they will be treated and can defer admission until single-sex accommodation is available if they so wish.

Subsequent checks have confirmed that the issue is being addressed effectively and sensitively by the Scottish health service so that patients' rights and dignity are respected. We continue to monitor closely progress on this issue.

Care and Repair Projects

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what public resources have been made available for care and repair projects in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97; [16677]

(2) how many houses have been improved in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97 with assistance from care and repair projects. [16678]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Comprehensive information is not held centrally. The available information, relating to projects jointly funded by Scottish Homes and local authorities, is set out in the table.

	Revenue funding (estimate)[1] *(£ million)*	*LA capital grant contribution*[2] *(£ million)*	*Number of homes covered*
1994–95 (outturn)	0.8	3.1	616
1995–96 (outturn)	1.0	3.7	794
1996–97 (planned)	1.2	3.2	750

Source:
Scottish Homes.
Notes:
[1] Total revenue funding for salaries and other running costs of projects estimated by grossing up from Scottish Homes contribution, which is normally matched equally by local authorities.
[2] Contributions are in the form of improvement and repair grants for works costs. Other costs are met from care and repair client's own resources, and charitable and other funding. Scottish Homes does not contribute to these costs.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16751]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Non-departmental public bodies are established to operate at arm's length from Government, often under specific statutory powers. An NDPB's governing body is responsible for the management and control of the body's functions.

Ministers and their Departments are responsible for monitoring the performance of the NDPBs which they sponsor, and for ensuring that they operate within the framework of controls set out in the Treasury and Cabinet Office guidance "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments."

A Scottish Office booklet, "The Hiring and Managing of External Consultants", which draws on the recommendations of an efficiency scrutiny "The Government's Use of External Consultants"—published in November 1995—gives guidance on best practice in the procurement and management of external consultants. This booklet is available to all Scottish Office NDPBs.

Mr. Alan Lewis

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the occasions on which Scottish Office Ministers have met Mr. Alan Lewis in an official capacity since 1987; and what subjects were discussed on each occasion. [15664]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* The Department's records indicate that my right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade, the then Minister of State at the Scottish Office, met Mr. Lewis in an official capacity on 7 July 1988 to discuss industry matters.

Messrs Kynoch Of Keith

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the cost of the public support provided to Messrs Kynoch of Keith; and how many jobs have been created or protected in Scotland as a result of that support. [15667]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* The public financial support which the Kynoch Group plc, formerly G. and G. Kynoch, has received has been through the investment by the former Scottish development agency which has passed to Scottish Enterprise as its successor body. Scottish Enterprise's investment in Kynoch Group plc is an operational matter within the delegated authority of Scottish Enterprise and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Illingworth Morris and Crombie Mills

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions his Department held with *(a)* Crombie Mills of Aberdeen and *(b)* Illingworth Morris between 1988 and 1993; [15812]

(2) what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* his Department held with Mr. Alan Lewis about (i) Illingworth Morris and (ii) Crombie Mills of Aberdeen in the period 1988 to 1993. [15811]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* The Department's records indicate that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, then Minister of State for Industry at the Scottish Office, met Mr. Lewis on 7 July 1988 to discuss industry matters. Subsequently on 5 September 1989 he visited J. and J. Crombie, Grandholm Mills, Aberdeen.

The Department's records also indicate a discussion between an official of the Department and a representative of J. and J. Crombie on or around 3 June 1991, to establish information about the closure of Grandholm Mills, which had just been announced.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance was provided from public funds to *(a)* Crombie Mills of Aberdeen and *(b)* Illingworth Morris between 1988 and 1993. [15813]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* None.

Council House Waiting Lists

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were on council house waiting lists in Scotland in *(a)* each Scottish local authority and *(b)* Scotland as a whole in each year from 1990 to 1996; and if he will make a statement. [15893]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Reliable information is not held centrally.

Road Construction

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of *(a)* motorway and *(b)* trunk roads have been constructed in Scotland for each year since 1992; and what percentage in each year was in rural areas. [16272]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information set out as follows is the motorway and trunk road milage constructed on major schemes completed in Scotland in each year since 1992. This information is not held centrally for minor schemes.

Miles

Year	*Motorway (length)*	*Trunk road (length)*
1992	12.5	9.5
1993	6.3	16.4
1994	16.5	5.5
1995	16.1	2.5
1996	9.2	4.5

At least 80 per cent. of this total mileage over the five-year period was constructed in rural areas.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of *(a)* motorway and *(b)* trunk roads he proposes to construct in (i) 1997 and (ii) 1998. [16273]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not possible to give a precise figure of mileage to be constructed in any future year. In 1997, a total of 20.7 miles of motorway and 12 miles of trunk road major schemes will be under construction or will commence construction. In 1998, a further 13.7 miles of motorway and 3.9 miles of trunk road is programmed for construction.

Mrs. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the total expenditure on *(a)* motorway and *(b)* trunk road construction in Scotland since 1992. [16295]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Major scheme expenditure on motorways and trunk roads in Scotland since 1992 is set out in the following table. As it is not practical to attempt to extract and allocate the expenditure on minor schemes over this period to either motorway or trunk road, this has been listed separately.

£ million

Year	*Motorway*	*Trunk Road*	*Minor Schemes*
1992–93	90	25.1	17.1
1993–94	56.5	45.1	9.9
1994–95	151	8.4	17.2
1995–96	86	12.8	12.9
1996–97[1]	53	26	13.0

[1] Forecast outturn 1996–97.

Departmental Salaries

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff in his Department and each of its executive agencies earn a gross annual salary of £43,000 or more. [16297]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of staff in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies earning a gross annual salary of £43,000 or more at 1 January 1997 is shown in the following table.

All staff in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies earning a gross annual salary of £43,000 or more at 1 January 1997

Department	*Total*
Scottish Office (core)	220
Executive agencies	10
Scottish Office (excluding SPS)	230
Scottish Prison Service	11

Pupils

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage and how many *(a)* primary school pupils and *(b)* secondary school pupils were in classes of over 30 in the latest census (i) in each local authority and (ii) in total; and what was the (1) actual and (2) percentage change in numbers against the previous year's census. [16296]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Statistics on class size in primary schools are collected biennially. The available information is given in the table. Schools have been allocated to their current education authority. Information on individual class sizes in secondary schools is not collected centrally.

Publicly funded primary schools[1]
Primary pupils in classes of 31 or more, at September in each year[2]

Education authority	*1993 Number of pupils in classes of 31 or more*		*1995 Number of pupils in classes of 31 or more*		*Change 1993–1995 Change in number of pupils in classes of 31 or more*	
	Number	*As percentage of all pupils*	*Number*	*As percentage of all pupils*	*Number*	*Percentage change*[3]
Scotland	75,286	17	79,266	18	3,980	5
Aberdeen City	2,744	17	3,118	20	374	14
Aberdeenshire	3,080	15	3,134	15	54	2
Angus	2,627	28	2,013	21	–614	–23
Argyll and Bute	928	12	1,191	15	263	28
Clackmannanshire	731	17	1,021	23	290	40
Dumfries and Galloway	2,052	16	2,016	16	–36	–2
Dundee City	3,368	26	3,324	27	–44	–1
East Ayrshire	2,023	18	2,455	22	432	21
East Dunbartonshire	1,983	20	2,497	24	514	26
East Lothian	1,015	14	834	11	–181	–18
East Renfrewshire	3,003	37	2,729	33	–274	–9
Edinburgh, City of	7,696	26	8,599	28	903	12
Falkirk	2,330	19	2,697	22	367	16
Fife	5,387	17	4,704	15	–683	–13
Glasgow, City of	7,702	15	8,407	16	705	9
Highland	1,996	10	1,795	9	–201	–10
Inverclyde	1,122	14	1,244	16	122	11
Midlothian	1,181	16	1,381	19	200	17
Moray	732	9	886	11	154	21
North Ayrshire	2,138	17	2,139	17	1	0
North Lanarkshire	4,556	15	4,103	14	–453	–10
Orkney Islands	64	4	33	2	–31	–48
Perth and Kinross	1,541	15	1,605	15	64	4
Renfrewshire	3,829	25	4,084	26	255	7
Scottish Borders	544	6	857	10	313	58
Shetland Islands	0	0	31	1	31	—
South Ayrshire	2,317	24	2,752	29	435	19
South Lanarkshire	4,327	16	4,491	17	164	4
Stirling	911	14	894	13	–17	–2
West Dunbartonshire	1,176	13	1,248	14	72	6
West Lothian	1,993	14	2,859	20	866	43
Western Isles	190	7	125	5	–65	–34

[1] Includes education authority, grant aided and self governing schools.
[2] Includes pupils in classes covering more than one stage.
[3] Percentage change based on small numbers should be treated with caution, as a small actual change could result in a large percentage change.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

United Nations Industrial Development Organisation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to expand opportunities within the aid programme for British consultants in *(a)* fisheries and *(b)* other matters, following United Kingdom withdrawal from UNIDO. [16356]

Dr. Liam Fox: Wide-ranging opportunities for British consultants are already available under the British development programme. The ODA is actively developing a new strategy for strengthening its links with the private sector in a broad range of sectors.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the decision to withdraw from UNIDO on *(a)* developing countries and *(b)* employment of British consultants by UNIDO. [16532]

Dr. Fox: The impact of UK withdrawal from UNIDO will have little effect on developing countries. The Government believe that greater impact for developing countries can be achieved by the use of other channels for our resources. There is no restriction in UNIDO's statute on consultancies being awarded to non-member states.

St. Helena

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if an aid settlement has yet been agreed for St. Helena. [16536]

Dr. Liam Fox: I am pleased to advise that my right hon. and noble Friend, the Minister for Overseas Development has this month approved a £26 million development commitment to St. Helena covering the next three years. This significant allocation, which represents an increase over previous plans, is linked to an agreement between the St. Helena Government and Her Majesty's Government on a three-year country policy plan. This provides a detailed framework for the reform and development of the island's economy. It illustrates the Government's continuing commitment to ensuring economic development and proper governance of the UK dependent territories as a whole.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Comparative Statistics

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy when asked by hon. Members to provide comparative statistics between Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom, or the United Kingdom as a whole, to obtain the necessary figures from other Departments and to publish them. [15819]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No. It would not be appropriate to provide statistical information on subjects for which I am not responsible.

Car Parking Spaces

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many car parking spaces are provided *(a)* on the Stormont estate and *(b)* at Rosepark House (i) free of charge and (ii) for which charges are made; how many were provided five years ago; and if he will make a statement. [15817]

Mr. Moss: There are some 2,461 parking spaces in the Stormont estate, including 240 at Netherleigh, and 235 at Rosepark house. The corresponding figures five years ago were 2,405, including 240 at Netherleigh, and 230. Charges are not made for the use of these spaces.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16753]

Sir John Wheeler: The central Northern Ireland civil service guidance on employment of consultants is derived from the efficiency unit's 1994 report on "The Government's Use of External Consultants". Each Northern Ireland Department has, as required, drawn that guidance to the attention of its non-departmental public bodies. It is then for the Department concerned to settle the appropriate monitoring arrangements for NDPB's conduct in this area, taking account of the particular circumstances in which each NDPB operates.

Housing

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the percentage change in the number of households assessed as being in priority need by the Housing Executive between 1986 and 1996. [16879]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose chief executive has advised me that the category "priority need" was established in 1989 and that the information from that date is as follows:

Year	*Number in priority need*
1989–90	3,604
1995–96	5,166
Change	43 per cent.

The total number of presenters increased by 61 per cent. from 6,675 in 1989–90 to 10,768 in 1995–96.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many households have presented themselves as homeless to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each of the last five years and the current year to date; and what percentage of those have been assessed as being *(a)* unintentionally homeless and *(b)* in priority need. [16880]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the chief executive has advised me that the information is as follows:

col. a	*col. b*	*col. c*	*Unintentionally homeless*[1] *col. d*	*col. e*	*col. f*	*col. g*
Year	*Presented as homeless*	*Intentionally homeless*	*Number*	*Percentage (d/b)*	*In priority need*	*Percentage (f/b)*
1996–97[2]	8,168	606	7,562	92	3,430	42
1995–96	10,768	847	9,921	92	4,319	40.1
1994–95	10,068	848	9,220	91.6	4,014	39.9
1993–94	9,731	804	8,927	91.7	3,971	40.8
1992–93	10,099	1,054	9,045	89.6	4,061	40.2
1991–92	10,081	1,235	8,846	87.7	4,158	41.2

[1] Includes those in priority need.
[2] To 31 December 1996.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15917]

Mr. Streeter: The statutory minimum age requirements enforced by the Lord Chancellor's Departments and the agencies for which the Lord Chancellor has ministerial responsibility are as follows.

Individuals under the age of 18 cannot act on their own behalf as plaintiffs. Proceedings are issued through a next friend or guardian ad litem. This applies in all cases unless the claim is being made for the recovery of wages—County Courts Act 1984, section 47. In those circumstances, minors can act for themselves.

An individual under the age of 18 cannot act on his or her own behalf as a defendant in civil proceedings. This applies in all cases save where the claim is for a liquidated amount and permission has been granted by the court allowing the minor to act for him or herself.

Jurors qualify for jury service if they are at least 18 years old on the day jury service is to start.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many asylum seekers have appealed against refusals of asylum received since July 1996 for each month since July 1996. [15806]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Doug Henderson, dated 20 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of appeals received for each month since July 1996 from asylum seekers who have been refused asylum.

The number of appeals received per month by the Immigration Appellate Authority since July are as follows:

1996

July: 2,242

August: 1,656

September: 1,822

October: 2,909

November: 2,165

December: 1,552

1997

January: 2,375

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16185]

Mr. Streeter: This reply is given on behalf of the Court Service, the Land Registry, the Northern Ireland Court Service, the Public Record Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department headquarters and its associated offices, and the Public Trust Office. No comprehensive records are held centrally and it has not therefore been possible in the time available to supply all the information sought or to verify some of the details provided.

Total expenditure in the Court Service during 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 to date was £927,575, £2,103,273 and £1,870,237 respectively. No information is held centrally about the names of the agencies used, the number of staff employed or the length of contracts. It has not therefore been possible to determine the median cost per person recruited.

The Public Record Office has used five agencies; Blue Arrow, Brook Street, Reed, Kelly Services and Hays Accountancy. Total expenditure in 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97 to date was £149,968.57, £223,260.31 and £202,034.45 respectively. No information is available about the number of staff employed or the length of the contracts. It has not therefore been possible to determine the median cost per person recruited.

Cost information for the Public Trust Office and LCD headquarters was not kept separately during 1994–95 but total expenditure in this year was £439,462. This related to the employment of 134 agency staff in LCD headquarters and its associated offices, and 38 agency staff in the Public Trust Office.

The Public Trust Office has used six employment agencies in the last three years; Ecco Employment Agency Hays Accountancy Personnel, Eclipse, Myriad, Key Entry and Recruit Plc. In 1995–96, 125 staff were employed; and in 1996–97 to date, 127 staff have been employed, at a cost of £24,208 and £514,717 respectively.

In LCD headquarters and its associated offices, 108 agency staff were employed during 1995–96, and 113 in 1996–97 to date, at a cost of £834,534 and £565,490 respectively. A total of 12 agencies have been used; Alfred Marks, City Centre Bureau, PS Personnel, Eclipse, Workflow, Kelly Services, Excel, Dagmar Tara, Premier Ltd and Adecco UK Ltd. As neither organisation holds detailed records, it has not been possible to determine the median cost per person recruited.

The Northern Ireland Court Service has used two employment agencies during the period in question; Grafton Recruitment and Kennedy Recruitment. A total of eight, seven and six staff were employed in the last three years, at a cost of £73,946,78, £36,213.77 and £36,610.88 respectively. Based on 1966 figures, the median cost in respect of Grafton Recruitment was approximately £60 per day, £4.50 per hour in respect of Kennedy Recruitment but the average length of contract is not known, as each case varied according to staffing needs.

The Land Registry has not used private employment agencies in the last three years.

Whitemoor Prison (Escape)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will place a copy of the transcript of the second Whitemoor escape trial in the Library. [16543]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 20 February 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question as to whether a copy of the transcript of the second Whitemoor escape trial will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

The trial judge gave two rulings: one on discharging the jury, and a second on the contempt of court proceedings. A transcript has been made of these rulings and I will ensure that a copy is placed in the Library.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16755]

Mr. Streeter: Five non-departmental public bodies have the budgetary power to appoint external consultants. They are all required to report to the Department at regular intervals showing expenditure on external consultants/professional fees. Guidance on best practice on the procurement and management of external consultants is contained in the efficiency unit scrutiny report, "The Government's Use of External Consultants", which is available to all NDPBs.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Equipment and Furniture

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will list the cost and number of items of equipment and furniture that *(a)* have been stolen and *(b)* are otherwise unaccounted for from the House during the past 12 months, listing by name any such items valued at £5,000 or more, and showing information technology material separately. [17058]

Sir Raymond Powell: Some 12 items valued in total at approximately £10,000 have been reported stolen or otherwise unaccounted for in the House of Commons during the past 12 months. Of these, two were IT equipment. No item was valued at £5,000 or more.

WALES

BSE

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of BSE cases in Wales to date; and if he will make a statement. [15833]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The latest number of confirmed BSE cases in Wales is as follows:

Year	*Cases*
Pre 21 June 1988	54
21 June 1988 to 31 December 1988	131
1989	507
1990	1,083
1991	2,234
1992	3,716
1993	3,627
1994	2,296
1995	1,322
1996	600
1997	7

EU Funding

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the income, from grants, subsidies and other payments received by or on behalf of Wales from the European Union in each of his last three years. [15993]

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 14 February 1977]:* Over the last three calendar years, project sponsors in Wales have received structural fund payments of over £123 million. However, since there is no obligation on direct applicants to European schemes to notify my Department, and since many EU schemes of assistance involve a direct approach to the Commission or use of an intermediary, the total income into Wales from all European funded sources will be somewhat greater.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16181]

Mr. Hague: Information is not kept in the form requested. The available information is as follows:

	1994–95 £	*1995–96* £	*1996–97 (to date)* £
Kelly Services (UK) Ltd.	11,406	65,090	67,163
Kinetic Ltd.	1,737	3,521	4,934
Pertemps Recruitment Partnership	892	18,338	1,203
Adia (UK) Ltd.	—	15,817	—
Brook Street Bureau	—	—	579
Atebion Training	—	—	551
Employment Agency	—	—	—
Total	14,035	102,766	74,430

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16424]

Mr. Hague: My Department has examined its waste management activity and, as a result, various initiatives are in place which are improving overall efficiency and reducing environmental effects.

In particular, the Welsh Office has a range of targets aimed at reducing the amount of waste it sends to landfill. Substantial quantities of waste paper, aluminium cans, toner cartridges, plastics, old wooden pallets and polythene packaging are being directed away from landfill.

In addition to the environmental benefits, these initiatives are bringing significant financial gains through the generation of revenue and reduction in waste disposal costs.

My Department is committed to doing more where possible in future. Welsh Office staff are regularly encouraged toward further improved performance including the minimisation of waste at source.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental of Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and

(b) ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16284]

Mr. Hague: My Department's property management regime provides for professional consultants to carry out regular inspections and assessments of Welsh Office buildings aimed at identifying all significant hazardous materials. Welsh Office property records highlight factors relating to our buildings which present a potential health and environmental hazard. From the information compiled, annual maintenance programmes are devised and implemented to ensure full compliance with statutory and health and safety obligations.

Specifically, asbestos registers are maintained for all Welsh Office property. Other significant health and environmental hazards covered by Welsh Office risk management arrangements include: legionella, water chlorination, radon and ozone-depleting substances.

Welsh Office policy on ozone-depleting substances is to reduce and ultimately eliminate their use in its buildings. My Department has replaced all halon fire extinguishers with ozone-friendly alternatives. It has also established an inventory of the remaining equipment which contain ozone-depleting chemicals. These substances are used mainly by the Welsh Office in the operation of the main refrigeration plant. All such systems are subject to stringent maintenance regimes intended to readily detect any abnormalities.

NHS Trusts (Pay Rises)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what data he has collected from national health service trusts in Wales on the pay rises which have been awarded to chief executives of trusts during this wage round *(a)* in percentage terms and *(b)* in money terms. [16768]

Mr. Hague: None. Details will be included in annual reports, which will be placed in the Library. The amount of remuneration is a matter for each trust to determine. I will ask the chairman of the relevant trust to write to the hon. Member if he will provide details of individual cases of concern.

Nurses

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what data he has collated on the numbers employed in the NHS in Wales as agency nurses, and bank nurses on a whole-time equivalent basis. [16771]

Mr. Hague: Information on agency and bank nurses is not collected centrally. However, informal inquiries in 1995 suggested that the contribution made by such staff was around 500 whole-time equivalents.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16748]

Mr. Hague: The use of external consultants by those non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department is subject to the same controls as apply to all their activities which are funded by public expenditure. These include operating within the parameters of management statements and financial memoranda agreed with the Treasury and the Department, audit scrutiny and a structured programme of corporate planning.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many student nurses have been accepted on courses under Project 2000 in each year since its commencement; how many student nurses have dropped out during their courses; and how many Project 2000 qualified nurses have not taken up employment as nurses in the national health service in Wales. [16769]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows. Information on numbers who have not taken up employment in the national health service in Wales is not collected centrally.

P2000 nurse students

Wales

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Starters	100	927	786	656	725	788
Leavers during course	12	216	174	114	79	52

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16190]

Mr. Hanley: The tables provide the information:

	1994–95		*1995–96*		*1996–97*			
Agency	*Number of staff*	*Cost £*	*Number of staff*	*Cost £*	*Number of staff*	*Cost £*	*Median*	*Average length of contract*
Manpower	nil	nil	9	21,516	5	14,478	not available	8 weeks
Queensway	nil	nil	1	2,819	1	5,951	not available	n/a (call off contracts)
Reed	14	65,400	14	107,928	77	119,830	9,924	15 weeks
Tepl Ltd.	8	36,886	14	90,482	12	135,969	13,860	13 months
Blue Arrow	nil	nil	2	2,600	nil	nil	Not available	15 months
Purcon	nil	nil	1	20,907	2	42,071	14,762	8 months

Agency	1994–95 Number of staff	1994–95 Cost £	1995–96 Number of staff	1995–96 Cost £	1996–97 Number of staff	1996–97 Cost £	Median	Average length of contract
Clayman	1	16,500	nil	nil	nil	nil	16,500	1 year
Chorley	nil	nil	1	16,400	nil	nil	16,400	1 month
Hodgkinson	nil	nil	nil	nil	1	8,191	16,382	5 months
Total	23	118,786	42	262,652	98	326,490		

Overseas Development Administration—figures

Agency	1994–95 Number of staff	1994–95 Cost £s	1995–96 Number of staff	1995–96 Cost £s	1996–97 Number of staff	1996–97 Cost £s	Median	Average length contract
Josephine Sammons	Nil	Nil	9	23,921	63	155,168	Not available	5 weeks
Alfred Marks	30	62,666	10	73,296	8	27,445	Not available	5 weeks
Office Angels	10	36,045	6	38,671	5	44,691	Not available	7 weeks
PAX	12	85,039	11	93,321	9	56,769	Not available	5 weeks
ECCO	3	10,741	2	10,330	2	14,103	Not available	12 weeks
City Centre Bureau	1	21,757	1	18,155	1	8,645	Not available	8 weeks
Rogers and Gillespie	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	12,356	Not available	3 weeks
Total	56	216,248	39	257,694	89	319,177		

Former Yugoslavia

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the French Foreign Minister about the outcome of the latter's meeting with the leaders of the opposition in Yugoslavia; what plans he has for a similar meeting; and if he will make a statement. [16582]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The French Foreign Ministry has briefed us on the outcome of the Serbian opposition leaders' recent visit to Paris. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary hopes to be able to see the three leaders in London on 26 February.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16570]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Ministers attend Scottish Grand Committee meetings as part of their normal parliamentary duties and officials do so as part of their normal departmental duties. Expenditure falling to the Department has been limited to travelling costs. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary attended the Scottish Grand Committee meeting on Friday 5 July 1996 in Dumfries and Monday 13 January 1997 in Edinburgh and had officials in attendance as necessary.

Turkey

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Turkish Government to review the prison sentence imposed on Soner Onder at the Istanbul state security court on 12 December 1996. [16775]

Mr. David Davis: We have been following the case of Mr. Soner Onder closely and with concern. We understand that Mr. Onder will exercise his right of appeal. Our embassy in Ankara has made sure that the Turkish authorities are fully aware of the widespread dismay here at his sentence.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16758]

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, on 13 February 1997, Official Report, column 296.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the minimum age requirements enforced by her Department. [15918]

Mr. Sproat: The Department and the two agencies for which it is responsible—Historic Royal Palaces and The Royal Parks—have a minimum age requirement of 16 for external recruitment. The agencies have a minimum age of 17 for jobs involving driving, and The Royal Parks has a minimum age of 18 and a half years for the recruitment of constables.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the ways in which her Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of *(a)* energy use and *(b)* waste management within those buildings her Department occupies; and if she will make a statement. [16418]

Mr. Sproat: Following an external energy audit, my Department is undertaking a phased implementation of work to our buildings to achieve a cost-effective reduction in energy consumption. This will assist in my Department's efforts to make 8 per cent. savings in consumption by 2000, against a base line setting year of 1994–95, in accordance with targets set by green Ministers. A waste audit is also being undertaken to aid the process of setting realistic targets for waste minimisation in the near future. Paper saving measures are already in place as well as recycling schemes for glass, cans, plastic cups and paper.

Torbay Cinema

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will take steps to ensure the protection of the listed features of the Torbay cinema. [16540]

Mr. Sproat: The Torbay cinema is a grade II* listed building, and is protected under the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Listed building consent is required for demolition of the building and for any works of alteration or extension which would affect its special character. Any application for consent is a matter for the local planning authority in the first instance. In determining applications for consent, the local planning authority must take account of Government policy as set out in planning policy guidance note 15: "Planning and the Historic Environment". The guidance advises that there should be a general presumption in favour of the preservation of listed buildings. In the case of listed building consent, applications relating to grade I and II* buildings, the local planning authority is required to notify English Heritage and—if it is minded to grant consent—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who is empowered to call in cases for his own decision.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment her Department had made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings her Department occupies; and if she will make a statement. [16312]

Mr. Sproat: My Department employs consultants to undertake assessments in accordance with statutory requirements so as to identify hazardous material in buildings occupied. Registers are maintained of any known materials and regular further inspections made.

In respect of ozone-depleting substances, all equipment where such substances exist is maintained by external contractors in accordance with statutory and best practice requirements as part of their terms of employment. Risk assessments are carried out as part of this work.

British Library

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the original estimated cost of the new British library project in London; what is the latest estimated cost; and how much of this cost will be met by central Government. [16447]

Mr. Sproat: The original estimated cash cost of the whole of the new British library project was £450 million. It now stands at £511.1 million. The project is being funded wholly by central Government.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of her Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if she will list the meetings of the Committee which *(a)* and *(b)* have attended indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16566]

Mr. Sproat: No Ministers or officials from the Department of National Heritage have attended a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what monitoring takes place by her Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16754]

Mr. Sproat: Non-departmental public bodies are established to operate at arm's length from the Department and are often set up under specific statutory powers. An NDPB's board has responsibility for the day-to-day management and control of the body's functions, including the use of external consultants.

My Department is responsible for monitoring the performance of the NDPBs it sponsors, and for ensuring that they operate within a framework of controls drawn up between my Department and its NDPBs. Within this framework, they are given administrative delegations within which they operate. The use of external consultants is one such delegated limit. If the NDPB wishes to let a contract above its delegated limit, it must seek my Department's prior approval.

Television Licence (Pensioners)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will implement the recommendation of the Peacock committee that pensioners on supplementary benefit should not have to pay a television licence fee. [16583]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 19 February 1997]:* The Peacock committee report of 1986 recommended that pensioners drawing supplementary pension in households wholly dependent on a pension should be exempt from the television licence fee. Supplementary pension was replaced in 1988 by the income support scheme. The cost of identifying pensioners drawing income support in households wholly dependent on a pension would be disproportionate and the only realistic alternative would therefore be to introduce free television licences for all

pensioners drawing income support. Such a measure would inevitably prompt demands for similar treatment for other people on income support, many of whom might be thought to have an equally valid claim to a concession. The cost of any such concession in lost licence fee revenue would be considerable and would need to be offset by an increase in the licence fee for all other licence holders, including pensioners. The Government are not persuaded that this would be justified.

TREASURY

Finance Bill

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations took place in respect of clauses 51 to 54 of the Finance Bill before presentation of the Bill. [16103]

Mr. Oppenheim: Customs published a consultation document, entitled "Rationalisation of Debt Recovery Law" in May 1996. It was sent to 180 trade and advisory bodies and invited comments on Customs' proposal for changes to the existing debt recovery legislation.

ECOFIN

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union. [17101]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the UK at the Economic and Finance Council of the European Union in Brussels on 17 February.

The Council carried out an examination of the Belgian new convergence programme for the period 1997 to 2000 and welcomed the programme's strategy for fiscal consolidation as credible, adequate to the particular public finance conditions of Belgium and well adapted to the institutional structure of the state.

The Council agreed in principle to provide exceptional financial assistance to Armenia, Georgia and Tajikistan. A final decision will be taken at a later meeting following a formal Commission proposal for this assistance. This is subject to a UK parliamentary scrutiny reserve.

The Council also discussed the possibility of providing macrofinancial assistance to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This will be discussed again at a later meeting. It is subject to a UK parliamentary scrutiny reserve.

The Council then discussed the economic situation in the European Union. All member states were cautiously optimistic about the prospects for 1997 but agreed on the need for structural reform, including labour market flexibility, to tackle unemployment.

Single European Currency

Sir Raymond Whitney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the economic and commercial effects of British membership of a European single currency. [15052]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 19 February 1997]:* A hard-headed assessment of the economics and commercial effects of UK membership of the single currency will be made nearer the time, when it is necessary for a decision to be made on whether or not we should participate. At the moment, there are still considerable uncertainties, most notably on what degree of sustainable convergence will have been achieved by other member states.

Correspondence

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlie his Department's delay in replying to the letters from the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West dated 11 September 1996 and 12 December 1996, regarding his constituent, Mr. Alton Murphy; and if he will make a statement. [14036]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* The correspondence from Mr. Murphy related to claims for amounts overpaid as VAT in relation to supplies of spectacles. The reply has been delayed because Customs has been considering whether opticians' claims for overpayments are subject to the three-year time limit on VAT refunds in view of an earlier trade agreement with Customs. The matter was considered during judicial review proceedings decided last November, and Customs has since sought further legal advice in the light of the judge's comments. Customs announced on 10 February that there will be special transitional arrangements for opticians' claims, and I shall be replying fully to the hon. Member shortly.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlie his Department's delay in replying to the letters from the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West dated 15 October 1996 and 12 December 1996, regarding his constituent, Mr. M. J. Walker; and if he will make a statement. [14037]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 6 February 1997]:* Mr. Walker's correspondence related to claims for amounts overpaid as VAT arising from a recalculation of tax due following a change of the VAT retail scheme used. Claims for repayment of overpayments are now subject to a three-year time limit, the introduction of which resulted in an enormous volume of correspondence, both on the principle of introducing a time limit and the effect on particular businesses. This has unfortunately led to delays in replying to correspondence, but I shall be writing to the hon. Member shortly.

Millennium Club

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times over the last three years, he has addressed the Millennium Club in his official capacity; and if he will list the names of those present and the companies they represented on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [15693]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* None in my official capacity.

HEALTH

Tropical Diseases

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of tropical diseases have been diagnosed within the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the national health service of treating these cases. [16267]

Mr. Horam: Information on the numbers of all diseases notifiable under various Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations in England and Wales are published by the Office for National Statistics in the publications "MB2 Communicable Disease Statistics", annually, and "MB2" Infectious Disease Statistics", quarterly. Where known, numbers of cases of diseases contracted abroad are given. In addition, the public health laboratory service collects data voluntarily submitted by laboratories on those tropical diseases confirmed by laboratory tests and these are published in the PHLS's communicable disease report. Copies of these publications are available in the Library. Information on the cost to the NHS from travel-related infection is not held centrally. Questions relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, respectively.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) of 29 January, *Official Report*, columns *269–72* on PFI schemes in the health service, if he will list for each PFI scheme within his Department's responsibility not included in those answers information equivalent to that set out in the table in columns *271–72*. [14852]

Mr. Horam: The table gives the information requested for schemes, where the information is held centrally which have reached preferred bidder status or beyond, and which are not included in the tables referred to in my reply to the hon. Member for the City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) on 29 January at columns *269–72*.

Trust	*Scheme*	*Preferred bidder*	*Health authority approval*[1]	*FBC approval*	*Contract signature*
Barking, Havering and Brentwood Community NHS Trust	Long-stay mental health reprovision	[2]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Royal Hull Hospitals NHS Trust	Rationalisation of acute services on Hull Royal Infirmary site	[2]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust	Redevelopment of Stone Grove site	[2]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
St. James's and Seacroft University Hospitals NHS Trust	Medipark	[2]—	22 September 1995	26 January 1996	[3]—
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS Trust	Community and Mental Health Information System (CAMIS)	[2]—	14 August 1996	3 October 1996	12 December 1996
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Trust	Hospital Information Support System (HISS)	[2]—	19 February 1996	16 April 1996	[3]—
Central Middlesex NHS Trust	Ambulatory Care and Diagnostic Centre (ACAD)	[2]—	9 April 1996	29 May 1996	[3]—
Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust	Clinical Information System (CIS)	[2]—	March 1996	27 March 1996	[3]—
City Hospital NHS Trust	Replacement Patient Administration Scheme (PAS)	[2]—	June 1996	28 June 1996	[3]—
Liverpool Women's Hospital NHS Trust	HISS	[2]—	February 1996	29 February 1996	July 1996
South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust	Reprovision of Pathology services	[2]—	9 September 1994	6 December 1994	4 September 1996
Royal Victoria Infirmary and Associated Hospital NHS Trust	Multi-Storey Car Park	[2]—	[4]n/a	12 September 1996	17 September 1996
United Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust	Power Station	[2]—	24 April 1995	2 May 1995	14 July 1995
United Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust and Bradford Hospitals Trust	Reconfiguration of Pathology Services	[2]—	October 1995	October 1995	13 February 1997
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS Trust	North West Community Unit for the elderly	[2]—	4 April 1996	8 October 1996	[3]—
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS Trust	West Central Community Unit for the elderly	[2]—	4 April 1996	8 October 1996	[3]—
Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust	Concourse Redevelopment	[2]—	[4]n/a	July 1995	[3]—
Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust	Clinical Waste Incinerator	[2]—	[4]n/a	February 1996	[3]—
Nottingham Ambulance NHS Trust	Radio Replacement Scheme	[2]—	August 1996	September 1996	20 December 1996
Nottingham Health Authority	Standard Court (HQ building for the Health Authority)	[2]—	[4]n/a	January 1997	[3]—
Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham, University Hospital NHS Trust	Combined Heat and Power Facility	[2]—	September 1996	January 1997	[3]—
Barnet Healthcare NHS Trust	Residential Accommodation for elderly mentally ill	[2]—	February 1996	February 1996	July 1996
East Sussex Health Authority	Nursing Homes	[2]—	[3]—	October 1992	31 March 1994
St. Peter's Hospital NHS Trust	Housing Redevelopment and Management	[2]—	November 1994	March 1995	6 June 1995
Mayday Health Care NHS Trust	Energy Centre	[2]—	15 August 1995	May 1996	[3]—

Trust	Scheme	Preferred bidder	Health authority approval[1]	FBC approval	Contract signature
Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust	Patient Hotel and Conference Facilities	[2]—	October 1995	[2]October 1995	October 1995
Warrington Hospital NHS Trust	Magnetic Resonance Imager	[2]—	December 1994	October 1995	November 1995
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust	Staff Residences	[3]—	October 1995	October 1995	16 January 1997
Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust	HISS	[2]—	October 1995	23 August 1996	6 December 1996
Liverpool Women's Hospital NHS Trust	HISS	[3]—	February 1996	29 February 1996	July 1996
Lancashire Ambulance Services NHS Trust	Mobile Radio Communications Systems	[3]—	October 1995	9 July 1996	[3]—
East Cheshire NHS Trust	Patient Management Systems	[2]—	October 1996	9 October 1996	[3]—
Hull and Holderness[4] Community Health NHS Trust	Replacement of Withernsea Hospital	[2]—	2 August 1996	5 December 1996	[3]—
Southampton Community[4] Health Services	Lymington Hospital Reprovision	[2]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
South Kent Community[4] Health Care NHS Trust	Community Hospital in Tenterden	[2]—	October 1996	October 1995	[3]—

[1] Date of Health Authority not known centrally for cases which have not received full business case approval.
[2] Selected.
[3] Not yet approved or signed.
[4] These three schemes are for new hospitals which the NHS Executive have been informed of since the answer given in column 271–272 of the Official Report of 29 January 1997.
[5] Not applicable either because the Health Authority itself is commissioning the scheme or because Health Authority approval is not required in cases where the scheme has no impact on the method or delivery of clinical services.

Disability Services

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to local authority social services departments concerning *(a)* the unit cost of the personal care needs of disabled people and *(b)* the unit cost of services provided by or on behalf of the authority for personal care when considering eligibility for assistance with independent living. [16269]

Mr. Burns: Local authorities have the responsibility to assess individual needs and, where appropriate, to arrange support cost effectively. The Department of Health does not give detailed guidance on these issues.

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings which his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16277]

Mr. Horam: In the buildings for which it is responsible, the Department of Health has undertaken surveys to identify the presence of hazardous materials and ozone-depleting substances. Positive action has been taken to reduce or safely contain any such elements.

(a) Hazardous materials: buildings occupied by the Department do not contain any significant amounts of hazardous substances. Where their presence is unavoidable, they are identified, registered and recorded in accordance with legislation.

(b) Ozone-depleting substances: halon fire extinguishers are being phased out of all our buildings and refrigeration units are being replaced with energy efficient CFC-free equipment. Major air conditioning systems in our buildings are equipped with leak-detection sensors.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16416]

Mr. Horam: In the buildings for which it is responsible, the Department of Health operates an effective energy and environment action plan, which promotes all aspects of green housekeeping and which is reviewed regularly.

Each of our main buildings has been equipped with recycling facilities for common waste items for some time and we continue to look at ways of extending the range of waste collected for recycling. We now monitor the volumes of waste in these buildings to give a quantitative measure of the progress we are making in this area.

Penile Implants

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the health effects on men of silicone leakage from penile implants. [16901]

Mr. Horam: No research has been commissioned or evaluated on silicone leakage from penile implants.

Breast Implants

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the health effects on women of silicone migration from breast implants. [16900]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health has established a national breast implant registry to facilitate future research projects. Department of Health officials together with the relevant independent expert groups have evaluated all published research on this subject.

Health Service Staff Contracts

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff employed by NHS trusts or health boards are on local contracts outwith Whitley agreements. [16745]

Mr. Malone: Precise information is not available centrally. However, the current estimate is that in England 13 per cent. of staff are on locally negotiated contracts.

Out-of-hours Patients (Transport)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding the provision of transport for out-of-hours patients in rural areas; and if he will make a statement. [16609]

Mr. Malone: We have received no representations on this subject recently. The new general practitioner out-of-hours arrangements have been a great success, improving the quality of care for patients while easing the personal burden on the individual GP.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what mechanisms financial support is given towards the costs of travel of out-of-hours patients required by their doctor to make their way to primary care centres. [16610]

Mr. Horam: There is no provision for reimbursing any costs patients may incur while travelling to receive primary care.

Glaucoma

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients suffering from glaucoma were treated by general practitioners during *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95. [16611]

Mr. Malone: Information on the number of patients treated by their general practitioner for glaucoma is not available centrally.

Nurses and Midwives (Training)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pre-registration nursing and midwifery students commenced training as initial entrants by means of *(a)* salaried student places, *(b)* Project 2000 and *(c)* undergraduate study in each of the last five years. [16612]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for England for the information that is available on entries to and discontinuation from training.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16757]

Mr. Horam: Non-departmental public bodies are responsible for monitoring the use of external consultants as part of their operational management responsibilities; but the Department would expect to be made aware of plans for any major consultancies.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Hazardous Materials (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment his Department had made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16317]

Mr. Bates: The Cabinet Office, its agencies and the Central Office of Information undertake assessments of hazardous materials in accordance with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988. The use of ozone depleting substances is kept to the minimum.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment his Department had made of the presence of *(a)* hazardous materials and *(b)* ozone-depleting substances within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16306]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General.

Environmental Audit (Departmental Buildings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the ways in which his Department has demonstrated the ability to improve efficiency and competitiveness through an environmental audit of waste management within those buildings his Department occupies; and if he will make a statement. [16428]

Mr. Bates: The Cabinet Office, the agencies and the Central Office of Information play a full part in supporting the initiatives being carried forward in response to the 1990 White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", including membership of the Green Ministers' Group. Minimising waste is at the core of the Department's energy and environmental policy, which is supported by an action plan. The policy has proved effective during the first five years of the Government's campaign to reduce energy consumption and improve environmental performance; the Department has achieved its objective of meeting the Government's target of a 15 per cent. reduction in energy consumption to April 1996. The headquarters buildings in London recently received an award from Westminster city council for its contribution since 1992 to its recycling scheme.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mustard Gas Experiments

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what steps the War Pensions Agency has taken to evaluate the systems in *(a)* Australia, *(b)* the United States of America and *(c)* Canada for compensating former service personnel who are suffering long-term ill health as a result of mustard gas experiments conducted by their own Governments in previous years; [14383]

(2) if the burden of proof is on the claimant to prove his or her case in cases in which service personnel are claiming disablement as a result of experiments at the chemical defence establishment at Porton Down; [14384]

(3) if he will list the regulations introduced by his Department since 1986 which relate to claims made by individuals claiming disablement as a result of experiments at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down; [14390]

(4) what evaluation has been made by the War Pension Agency of the findings on the long-term health effects of mustard gas and lewisite reached by the US Institute of Medicine committee in its report "Veterans at Risk—the health effects of mustard gas and lewisite" edited by Constance Pechura and David Rall published in January 1993; and what was the basis of the evaluation. [14847]

Mr. Heald: No steps have been taken to evaluate either the US Institute of Medicine report quoted, or the systems in Australia, Canada and the United States of America for compensating former service personnel who may be suffering long-term ill health as a result of mustard gas experiments.

Under the war pensions scheme, where a claim is made within seven years of termination of service, the onus is on the Secretary of State to show beyond reasonable doubt that service has played no part in the cause or course of the claimed disablement. For claims made more than seven years after leaving service, where the onus is on the claimant, he is required only to raise at least a reasonable doubt, based on reliable evidence, that a condition may be due to service. The benefit of any reasonable doubt is always given to the claimant.

No regulations relate specifically to Porton Down experiments. The Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Order 1983, applies to all claims in respect of disablement due to service.

1987–165: Uprating order.

1988–248: Uprating order plus changes relating to income support.

1988–2248: Provisions for payment of pension by direct credit transfer.

1989–156: Uprating order plus amendments due to introduction of the community charge.

1990–250: Uprating order plus amendment to definition of the term "public funds".

1990–1308: Extension of entitlement to mobility supplement to the deaf-blind.

1991–766: Uprating order plus extension of entitlement to mobility supplement to certain amputees.

1992–710: Uprating order plus abolition of dependent's allowance and reduction in qualifying period for mobility allowance.

1992–3208: Abolition of gratuities for noise— induce sensorineural hearing loss of less than 20 per cent.

1993–598: Uprating order plus abolition of rank additions, education allowance and restoration of certain widow's pensions and amendments consequential to the introduction of council tax.

1994–772: Uprating order plus amendment to the definition of "injury" to exclude the effects of tobacco and consumption of alcohol and provisions relating to the suspension of pensions pending an appeal.

1994–1906: Supplementary pension for "pre-1973" widows.

1995–766: Uprating order plus effect of the disability living allowance mobility component on entitlement to mobility supplement and minor amendments concerning the suspension of pension pending appeal.

1996–732: Uprating order plus restoration of widow's pensions.

1996–1638: Provision for "pre-1914 War" and "inter war years" cases.

1996–2882: Manner and date of claim provisions.

Back-to-work Bonus

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who have received a back-to-work bonus; what has been the average amount of the bonus in each case; and what has been the total cost of the scheme to date. [15075]

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Back-to-work bonus statistics[1]

	All claimants
Number of bonus payments made from October 1996 to January 1997[2]	3,000
Total amount of bonus payments made from October 1996 to January 1997[3]	£248,000
Estimated average bonus payment[4]	£85.34
Estimated administrative cost of bonus payments made from October 1996 to January 1997[5]	£18,263
Claimants with an accrued bonus at the end of January 1997[6]	119,000

Sources:

1. Back-to-work bonus management information statistics.
2. The departmental "Ready Reckoner" and "The Benefit Agency Whole Unit Guide".

Notes:

[1] Provisional data based on claims held on the income support computer system (ISCS) and the jobseeker's allowance payment system (JSAPS). No clerically processed claims included. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.

[2] Claims authorised for payment recorded on JSAPS and ISCS.

[3] Total amount authorised for payment recorded on ISCS and JSAPS.

[4] Based on total amount authorised for payment recorded on ISCS and JSAPS.

[5] the cost of processing 3,000 bonus payments based on average salaries. Includes superannuation and employers' national insurance costs.

[6] Live claims on ISCS and JSAPS with a bonus accrual plus claims which have ended with a bonus accrual but no bonus payment has been made (claimants who return to benefit within 12 weeks and have not claimed a bonus retain the amount accrued during the previous claim).

Child Support Agency

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many section 18 appeals have been *(a)* upheld and *(b)* turned down by the Child Support Agency in each month since April 1993. [15085]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Miss Liz Lynne, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of section 18 appeals handled by the Child Support Agency.

There are no such things as section 18 appeals but the Agency handles section 18 *reviews* (normally referred to as second tier reviews). These are usually requested, in writing, when a client—either absent parent or parent with care—disagrees with a Child Support Officer's decision. If the client is still not satisfied following the review, they have the option to lodge an appeal, which will be handled by an independent Appeal Tribunal.

The attached table shows the breakdown of second tier review applications which have been cleared by the Agency; a monthly breakdown is available only from August 1994.

I hope this is helpful.

Child Support Agency Second Tier Reviews (August 1994–December 1996)

Month	*Second Tier Reviews Requests Refused/Withdrawn*	*Second Tier Reviews Completed*
August 1994	1,364	741
September 1994	1,178	855
October 1994	1,308	1062
November 1994	1,303	1,137
December 1994	1,002	970
January 1995	1,240	1,205
February 1995	1,250	1354
March 1995	1,294	1,470
April 1995	1,409	880
May 1995	897	1,014
June 1995	1,141	999
July 1995	1,040	1,170
August 1995	1,412	1,124
September 1995	1,329	883
October 1995	1,510	929
November 1995	1,638	975
December 1995	1,027	651
January 1996	1,552	872
February 1996	1,607	1,174
March 1996	1,249	1,182
April 1996	1,409	857
May 1996	1,576	883
June 1996	2,023	955
July 1996	1,869	1,022
August 1996	1,981	1,005
September 1996	2,198	1,152
October 1996	2,654	1,276
November 1996	2,754	1,140
December 1996	1,759	798
Total	43,973	29,735

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what actions are being taken by the Child Support Agency concerning allegations of fraud in respect of the production of posters for the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement. [15659]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant CB. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Miss Ann Chant to Ms Liz Lynne, dated 19 February 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about action being taken by the Child Support Agency into allegations of fraud in respect of the production of posters.

I am unaware of any such allegations. However, internal control systems within the Agency raised serious concerns over a service for distribution of posters. I can confirm that last year the Agency passed papers to the police in connection with previous business dealings with a private firm.

It would not be appropriate to comment further or speculate on a case which is still under police investigation.

I hope this is helpful.

Medical Appeal Tribunals (Posthumous Claims)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many successful posthumous claims in respect of *(a)* pneumoconiosis and *(b)* chronic bronchitis and emphysema were made to medical appeal tribunals in areas with former and present coal-mining communities in each of the last five years. [15246]

Mr. Roger Evans: Posthumous claims can be considered under normal rules for pneumoconiosis and in respect of those who died after 13 September 1993 for chronic bronchitis and emphysema. However, information on the numbers of such cases is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants of invalid care allowance also undertake part-time study. [15869]

Mr. Burt: It is estimated that 10,000 recipients of invalid care allowance are also undertaking part-time study. Estimates are based on sample data which may be unrepresentative.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1994–95.

Notes:

1. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 5,000.
2. Part-time study is defined in invalid care allowance as less than 21 hours a week.

Medical Services Centres (Targets)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by centre the targets negotiated by each medical services centre in its service level agreement with each disability benefits centre, for disability living allowance and attendance allowance in respect of *(a)* medical advice, *(b)* scrutiny, *(c)* assessment, *(d)* examinations and *(e)* complaints. [16497]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical services is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 19 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking if he will list by centre the targets negotiated by each medical services centre in its service level agreement with each disability benefits centre, for disability living allowance and attendance allowance in respect of (a) medical advice, (b) scrutiny, (c) assessment, (d) examinations and (e) complaints.

Details of all the negotiated targets are in the attached appendix.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Targets from service level agreements between medical services centres and disability benefit centres for disability living allowance and attendance allowance

Birmingham

	Target
Special rules	1 day
Written advice (normal)	3 days
Written advice (non standard GP factual reports/hospital case notes/consultants reports)	5 days
Oral advice	On demand
Standard and non standard factual reports	3 days

Targets from service level agreements between medical services centres and disability benefit centres for disability living allowance and attendance allowance

Birmingham

	Target
Standard and non standard factual reports (need to contact author)	5 days
Non standard reports	5 days
Medical appeals tribunals (advice on IIDB/SDA cases)	Within 5 days
Medical appeals tribunals—FME written request	10 days

Bootle

	Target
New claims (oral)	Same day
New claims (written)	Within 3 days
Special rules (normal)	Within 1 day
Special rules (need to contact GP)	Within 2 days
Severe mental impairment	Within 3 days
Reviews	As for new claims
Factual reports	Within 3 days
Factual reports (clarification with author)	Within 5 days
Medical appeals tribunals—advice on MAT cases	5 days from receipt
Medical appeals tribunals—preparation of requests for reports	10 days from receipt
Medical appeals tribunals—preparation of extracts of hospital case notes	10 days from receipt

Bristol

	Target
Medical advice (written)	3 days
Medical advice (oral)	1 day
Factual report (normal)	3 days
Factual reports (need to contact author)	5 days
Special rules	1 day
Special rules (need to contact author)	2 day
Severe mental impairment	3 days
Medical appeal tribunals	5 days

Cardiff

	Target
Medical advice (oral/written including special rules)	Same day
Non standard factual reports	3 days
Non standard factual reports (contact author)	5 days
Medical appeals tribunals (primary)	95 per cent. in 5 days
Medical appeals tribunals (secondary)	100 per cent. in 10 days

Edinburgh

	Target
Medical advice (oral)	Same day
Medical advice (written)	1 day unless longer is considered necessary
Non standard factual reports	5 days
Medical appeals tribunals	5 days

Glasgow

	Target
Factual reports (normal)	3 days
Factual reports (need to contact author)	5 days
Special rules	1 day
Special rules (need to contact GP)	2 days
Mental impairment	3 days
Advice on MAT cases	5 days

Glasgow

	Target
Complaints re factual reports (acknowledgement)	5 days
Complaints reply	10 days
Non standard factual reports	3 days
Medical appeals tribunals	5 days

Leeds

	Target
Special rules (need to contact GP)	2 days
Special rules (other)	1 day
Severe mental impairment	3 days
Normal rules	3 days
Reviews and appeals	3 days
Standard/non standard factual reports	
Normal	3 days
Need to contact author	7 days
Medical appeal tribunals	
Initial scrutiny pre hearing	5 days
FME pre hearing	5 days
Provide precis of hospital pre hearing case notes	10 days

Manchester

	Target
Special rules (normal)	1 day
Special rules (need to contact GP)	2 days
General advice (oral)	1 day
General advice (written)	5 days
Standard and non standard factual reports	3 days
Medical appeal tribunals	5 days

Newcastle

	Target
Special rules (except where GP contacted)	1 day
Other written advice	3 days
Standard and non standard factual reports	3 days
Standard and non standard factual reports (where GP needs to be contacted)	5 days
Medical appeals tribunals	7 days

Sutton

	Target
Normal rules primary	95 per cent. in 3 days
Normal rules secondary	100 per cent. in 5 days
Special rules primary	98 per cent. in 1 day
Special rules secondary	100 per cent. in 2 days
Medical appeals tribunals primary	70 per cent. in 3 days
Medical appeals tribunals secondary	98 per cent. in 5 days

Wembley

	Target
Normal rules	5 days
Special rules	1 day
Special rules (where GP needs to be contacted)	2 days
Standard and non standard factual reports (normal)	3 days

Wembley

	Target
Standard and non standard factual reports (where author needs to be contacted)	5 days
Medical appeals tribunals	5 days

Benefits Agency Medical Services

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what targets for quality of service in addition to clearance times are currently set for the Benefits Agency medical services. [16496]

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency medical service is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Alan Howarth, dated 19 February 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking what targets for quality of service in addition to clearance times are currently set for the Benefits Agency Medical Service (BAMS).

Targets for standards of service are set out in the BAMS Professional Standards, and the Client Service Standards. Details have been placed in the Library.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the results of the disability living allowance benefit review. [16666]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People gave to the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on 12 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *250*.

A copy of the review is available in the Library.

Benefits Agency Report

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what instructions he has given to the Benefits Agency in Wales on changes in the consultation period on the BA-area strategy unit report. [16525]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Benefits Agency has been instructed that none of the measures within the consultation document "BA Wales—Blue Print for The Future" are to be implemented during the consultation period.

All comments and concerns raised during the consultation period will be given full consideration.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what payments and expenses derived from part-time employment by jobseeker's allowance claimants are not treated as earnings by the Benefits Agency. [16764]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is as follows:

Employed earners

Income tax deducted; primary class 1 national insurance contributions deducted; one-half of any sum paid as a contribution towards an occupational or personal pension; payments in kind; payments (whether or not reimbursed by the employer) in respect of expenses wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred in the performance of the duties of the employment (but not including travelling expenses incurred by the claimant between his home and place of work or expenses incurred under arrangements made for the care of a member of the claimant's family owing to his absence from home).

Self-employed earners

An amount in respect of income tax; an amount in respect of class 2 and class 4 national insurance contributions; one-half of any sum paid as a contribution towards a personal pension; expenses wholly and exclusively defrayed for the purposes of the employment (but excluding capital expenditure, depreciation, sums employed or intended to be employed in the setting up or expansion of the business, loss incurred before the period over which the earnings are being assessed, capital repayments on loans taken out for the purposes of the business and business entertainment); excess of VAT paid over VAT received in the period over which the earnings are assessed; income expended in the repair of existing assets except to the extent that any sum is payable under an insurance policy for its repair and interst on loans taken out for the purposes of the business.

Note:

Part-time employment for the purposes of jobseeker's allowance is work in which a person is engaged for less than 16 hours a week on average (24 hours in the case of partners of people receiving income-based jobseeker's allowance).

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16750]

Mr. Burt: The use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies—NDPBs—is discussed and agreed with the Department,usually during the planning and allocation process and as such are included in any business or corporate plans. The results of any consultancy exercise are monitored each year as part of an established accountability review process and actual expenditure is recorded and monitored on a monthly basis throughout the financial year. The Department's NDPBs are also subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office and by the Department's own internal audit team.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the net present cost, in 1996 prices, of national insurance rebates and incentives paid to those who have joined appropriate personal pensions since 1988–89, assuming the social discount rate used by his Department. [13841]

Mr. Heald *[holding answer 4 February 1997]:* For the years 1987–88 to 1994–95, the latest date for which certified figures are available, the cost of national insurance rebates and incentives was £21.7 billion at net present value. This figure has been calculated using the GDP deflator and a social discount rate of 3.75 per cent. consistent with the Government Actuary's review of contracting out terms (Cm 3221). The figure includes the cost of providing flat rate rebates, incentives and age

additions to holders of appropriate personal pensions during this period. From 6 April 1997, flat rate rebates for APPs, and the age addition, will be replaced by age-related rebates. The costs of the new rebates will be contained by tailoring the amount needed by a funded pension to replace the state pension foregone according to the age of the policyholder. The allowance made for administrative expenses in the rebates are based on those of the more efficient providers. The rebates will also be capped to avoid excessive rebate levels.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the expenditure by his Department on housing benefit subsidy paid to local authorities in each of the years from 1989–90 to 1996–97; and what is his estimate for 1997–98 in respect of tenants of housing associations created as a result of large-scale voluntary transfer. [15164]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 10 February 1997]:* This information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Estimates of DSS housing benefit subsidy paid to local authorities in respect of private sector tenancies created as a result of large scale voluntary transfers

Year	*Subsidy (£ million)*
1990–91	9
1991–92	13
1992–93	37
1993–94	70
1994–95	110
1995–96	154
1996–97	216
1997–98	227

Source:
Departmental estimates used to inform the Public Expenditure Survey for the relevant year adjusted by the GDP deflator.

Notes:
1. The information relates only to the estimates of the housing benefit subsidy paid to local authorities in respect of private sector tenancies created as a result of large scale voluntary transfers for the years 1990–91 to 1997–98.

DEFENCE

Tornado GR1 Aircraft

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average annual running cost of a squadron of Tornado GR1 aircraft. [16563]

Mr. Soames: The average cost of operating a Tornado GR1 squadron, including the variable hourly flying costs and the apportionment of the station's fixed costs and overheads, is £78 million per annum.

Regimental Museums

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money his Department provided in each year since 1990–91 towards staff pay in *(a)* all the regimental museums in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the museum of the Royal Dragoon Guards and Prince of Wales's Own Regiment in York. [16648]

Mr. Soames: My Department currently contributes some £1.68 million in total to the operating costs of some 70 Army regimental and corps museums. The information for previous years is not available in the form requested.

The information requested for the museum of the Royal Dragoon Guards and the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment is as follows:

Financial Year	*RDG £*	*PWO £*
1992–93	9,300	8,800
1993–94	11,000	10,000
1994–95	11,000	10,300
1995–96	11,100	10,400
1996–97 (estimate)	12,000	8,900

The figures for the financial year 1990–91 and 1991–92 are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

WE-177 Bomb

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the operating costs of the WE-177 bomb in each of the past 15 years at 1995–96 prices. [16562]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 18 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *627*.

Environmental Information Regulations

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many inquiries have been received by his Department under the terms of the Environmental Information Regulations 1992; how many of these have been refused, and on what grounds; what has been the cost of substantive responses to such requests; and what amount has been received from those making requests towards recovery of these costs. [16807]

Mr. Soames: My Department's records indicate that, from 1 January 1993 to 31 January 1997, we received 108 questions. Before November 1995, only queries quoting the Environmental Information Regulations 1992 were classed as made under those terms. Subsequently, all queries on environmental issues have been treated as made under EIR92; 102 such queries have been received. None has been refused an answer.

My Department seeks to recover costs only if it is estimated that the work involved will exceed four man hours. Questioners in such cases are advised beforehand of the estimated costs and asked to confirm that they wish to proceed; to date, none has done so.

No records are made of the actual costs of providing substantive answers for which no charge is raised.

Army (Readiness to Change)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to adapt the readiness of the Army to changing strategic circumstances. [17103]

Mr. Portillo: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact, we can assume that we would have longer warning of any re-emerging threat to the UK or western Europe by conventional forces. On the other hand, recent events have underlined that it is important that we should be able to dispatch forces rapidly to deal with crises elsewhere.

In response, I have decided to shift the balance of investment in the Army further towards those units required to be at higher operational readiness. The changes build on the one army concept by taking account of the synergy between regular and reserve units.

For the two parachute battalions in the joint rapid deployment force, the present enhancement of some 105 Gurkhas will finish in 2000. The strengths of each battalion will then be increased by some 60 posts. With effect from 1 April this year, arrangements will be made to provide dedicated manpower and equipment for the Pathfinders—5 Airborne Brigade's reconnaissance platoon.

I have also decided to increase the manning levels of two of our three multiple-launch rocket system regiments by some 100 posts each to ensure they are fully ready to deploy without the need for reinforcement from elsewhere in the Army. The third regiment will not be required for short-notice operations. I have therefore decided that it should be transferred to the Territorial Army, in place of one of its two FH 70—155mm howitzer—artillery regiments. Consequently, the TA will be equipped with one of the Army's most modern and powerful equipments.

At the same time, we now assess that the majority of the TA will not be required for short-notice operations as formed units. Those units can therefore be moved to more extended readiness. That will not, however, reduce the scope for TA personnel to take part as individuals, or in small teams, in a wide range of operations. That is demonstrated by their significant and invaluable contribution in Bosnia. Furthermore, opportunities for individuals will be significantly improved by the Reserve Forces Act 1996. There will be no change to the establishment levels of the TA, or to the TA's vital role in deploying as formed units in a major crisis. We shall, however, be able to reduce the numbers required to be fully trained, while protecting training and activity levels across the whole range from individual to formation training. Certain specialist units will remain at higher readiness.

Some adjustments will also be made to the manning and equipment of the 12 regular light-roled national defence battalions to bring them in line with current requirements.

Gulf War Syndrome

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *630*, on Gulf war syndrome, when he expects to answer the question relating to *(a)* Mr. Rucker's inquiry and *(b)* the number of missing medical records. [15961]

Mr. Soames: I have written to the hon. Member and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

BSE

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many BSE-infected carcases are stored at former RAF Quedgeley; and if he will make a statement. [16910]

Mr. Soames: There are no BSE-infected carcases stored at RAF Quedgeley.

Nimrod Accident (Canada)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the board of inquiry into the Nimrod accident in Canada in September 1995 found evidence that other members of the Nimrod's crew had expressed misgivings to the pilot concerning the manoeuvres to be flown in the air display. [16936]

Mr. Soames: No.

Efficiency Savings

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the value of efficiency savings made by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Royal Navy and *(c)* the Royal Air Force in each of the last three years. [16893]

Mr. Soames: The information requested is available in the following publications, copies of which are in the Library of the House:

1993–94 : Departmental report by the MOD—the Government's expenditure plans 1995–96 to 1997–98 (Cm2801) (pages 30–31)

1994–95 : MOD performance report 1994–95 (Cm3055 (pages 36–37)

1995–96 : MOD performance report 1995–96 (Cm3448) (page 9)

In the course of researching this question, an inconsistency in the reporting of the figures for 1993–94 has come to light. This is being examined and I will write to the hon. Member when the matter has been resolved. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Lost or Stolen Articles

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records are kept in respect of articles lost or stolen whose value is less than *(a)* £150,000, *(b)* £100,000 and *(c)* £50,000. [16674]

Mr. Arbuthnot: All losses must be thoroughly investigated by the unit concerned and a full and factual record made. Losses under £100,000 value are reported as a total sum; those over £100,000 are reported individually.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of the items that have gone missing without explanation in each of the past three years; and what were the five most valuable items in each service in each year. [16675]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Losses are reported individually only where the value exceeds £100,000. Unexplained losses over £100,000 during the last three financial years were as follows:

	Value £
1993–94	
No cases	
1994–95	
1. Thermal imager lost in transit	118,000
2. Consignment of 3 in rockets lost in transit	104,000
1995–96	
1. Radar receiver lost in transit	130,000
2. One kit printed circuit lost in transit	164,000
3. 12 Harrier forward relay panels lost in transit	115,000

All losses were thoroughly investigated with a view to recovering the item in question and preventing a recurrence. When the search proved unsuccessful, the items in question were written off and noted in the relevant appropriation account.

Royal Flight

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the average flying hours for each of the last five years of aircraft used by the royal family. [16886]

Mr. Soames: The total hours flown by the aircraft concerned, covering communications, VIP and royal tasks—plus essential training—are as follows:

Financial year	*BAe 146*	*Wessex*	*BAe 125*
1992–93	1,769	740	4,645
1993–94	1,781	739	3,993
1994–95	1,440	791	3,511
1995–96	1,448	748	3,657
1996–97 (to 31 December 1996)	1,085	502	2,578

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to public funds of pre-positioning aircraft of the royal squadron for the private use of a member of the royal family *(a)* in each of the last five years and *(b)* for the flight from Nassau to Rock sound in March 1996. [16892]

Mr. Soames: The information requested at *(a)* is not readily available and could not be produced without incurring disproportionate costs. With respect to *(b)*, there was no cost to public funds associated with pre-positioning as the aircraft was already in Nassau in support of official business.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what basis repayments are calculated for private use of aircraft of the royal squadron. [16888]

Mr. Soames: The basis of the charge for private use of aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron is the marginal cost of operating the aircraft for the particular flight. Where appropriate, a "waiting" charge of £60 per hour is also levied. The only exception to this approach is when a member of the royal family is advised to use an aircraft of No. 32—the royal—squadron for safety or security reasons for a private journey when he or she could otherwise have used a commercial service. In such circumstances, the household in question will be charged the equivalent commercial rate.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rules govern whether a journey involving an aeroplane of the royal squadron is official or private. [16887]

Mr. Soames: A journey by a member of the royal family involving the use of an aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron is considered to be official if it is undertaken in pursuance of royal duties.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the payments made to his Department for private flights in aircraft of the royal squadron by members of the royal family in each of the years 1990 to 1994. [16885]

Mr. Soames: In accordance with the wishes of Her Majesty the Queen, the costs of private flights in aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron have been reimbursed to the MOD since 1 April 1995. Accordingly, no such payments were made in the period 1990 to 1994.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *436*, relating to royal flights, if he will list the equivalent data for 1995. [16912]

Mr. Soames: In accordance with the wishes of Her Majesty the Queen, the costs of private flights in aircraft of No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron have been reimbursed to the MOD since 1 April 1995. The information requested for the period 1 April 1995 to 31 December 1995 is as follows:

Date of journey	*Passenger*	*Route*	*Cost reimbursed £*
1 July 1995	HRH The Duke of Edinburgh	Sandringham to Kensington Palace	1,215
1 July 1995	HRH The Duke of Edinburgh	Kensington Palace to Sandringham	1,325
1 July 1995	HRH The Prince of Wales	Dyce to RAF Northolt	735
1 July 1995	HRH The Prince of Wales	Heathrow to Dyce	735
3 September 1995	Her Majesty The Queen	Dyce to Teesside	1,558
5 September 1995	Her Majesty The Queen	Teesside to Dyce	1,558
10 December 1995	Her Majesty The Queen	Blackpool to Northolt	1,186.67

Beef

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what percentage of beef provided for the armed services is *(a)* of British origin, *(b)* of EU origin and *(c)* of Argentinian origin; [16907]

(2) what factors are used in determining the country of origin of beef consumed by the armed forces. [16908]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The procurement of food for the armed forces is currently contracted to the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes. My Department does not specify the source or origin from which the NAAFI should obtain beef, or any other meat, but expects it to seek the best market prices for the products. There are no constraints on the choice of British meat products which are considered

equally with meat products sourced generally in the open market. The majority of our requirements are, however, for frozen beef.

The British market deals predominantly in fresh beef and consequently does not normally offer frozen British beef at the most competitive prices. As a result, most of our requirements are sourced from south America—mainly Brazil and Uruguay—New Zealand and Australia. A limited range of beef products including sirloin, foreribs, minced and diced beef are currently procured in the UK on value for money grounds. No records are kept of the volumes or percentages provided from the UK, EU or South America and this will, in any event, vary dependent upon markets providing the best value for money.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16761]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Advice on the use of external consultants is available to all of my Department's non-departmental public bodies, as listed in "Public Bodies", to ensure that they operate within the framework of controls set out in the Treasury and Cabinet Office guidance "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments".

My Department's non-departmental public bodies do not make significant use of external consultants, as shown in my answer to the hon. Member on 14 January 1997, *Official Report*, columns *233–34*. In the past five years, only two of our bodies, the Oil and Pipelines Agency and the RAF Museum, have spent money on services of this sort. In the case of the Oil and Pipelines Agency, there is a requirement for prior approval from my Department for all consultancy services. In the case of the service museums, different arrangements apply depending on the circumstances of the body, but there is a very close relationship between the museums and their departmental sponsoring divisions which ensures that any plans to use consultancy services should be known in advance.

Junior Leaders Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he announced the closure of the junior leader unit at Harrogate, North Yorkshire; when the site closed; when his Department put the Harrogate site up for sale; which estate agent was hired to sell the site; what has been the total cost to public funds to date of the attempted sale of the site; and if he will make a statement. [16844]

Mr. Soames: Following an initial announcement on 10 March 1992 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton) when Minister of State for the Armed Forces, *Official Report*, column *496*, about the future of junior leader and apprentice training, it was announced on 16 December 1992 that Harrogate was not to be converted to accommodate an Army junior leader regiment and that alternative defence uses would be sought. The site was formally closed on 1 December 1996. The Leeds office of Knight Frank commenced the marketing campaign in November 1995, but work on the sale of the site has been suspended pending a decision on the location of the proposed Army Foundation college. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, I am withholding information on the fees incurred in relation to this commission under exemption 7 of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he announced the termination of the junior leaders scheme. [16843]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend the member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton), when Minister of State for the Armed Forces, announced the cessation of the junior leaders scheme in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) on 16 December 1992, *Official Report*, columns *335-36*.

Efficiency Savings

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the value of efficiency savings made by *(a)* the royal yacht and *(b)* royal squadron in each of the last three years. [16894]

Mr. Soames: The annual running costs of HMY Britannia, excluding repair and refits, have remained broadly constant over the past three years. I refer the hon. Member also to my answer of 9 January 1996 to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) *Official Report*, column *96*.

Prior to 1 April 1995, royal flying tasks were undertaken by the Queen's Flight, based at RAF Benson. From that date, the flight was incorporated into No. 32 (The Royal) Squadron, tasked with undertaking a full range of communications, VIP and royal flying duties. This change was designed to achieve improvements in cost-effectiveness through better use of aircraft assets and through greater efficiency in support areas. Subsequently, the new arrangements for the funding of royal travel announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 16 October 1996 will facilitate further improvements in cost-effectiveness through the closer involvement of the royal household as the customer for the service provided by the squadron for royal tasks.

Personnel Administration and Pay Organisations

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the armed forces' personnel administration and pay organisations. [17293]

Mr. Soames: The Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency will be launched on 1 April 1997. The aim of AFPPA is the cost-effective provision, on a tri-service basis, of data and systems for the payment of military personnel, and to support the personnel management function, in peace, including crisis, transition to war and war. The agency will be formed from the Directorate of Naval Personnel Services and the Directorate of Naval Pay and Pensions at Gosport; the Directorate of Administrative Information Systems (Army) at Worthy Down, near Winchester; and the Directorate of Administrative Information Systems (RAF) and the RAF Pensions Branch at Innsworth, near Gloucester. In addition, a small agency headquarters office will be created at Innsworth in the first instance. On formation, the agency will employ some 1,000 civilian

and 200 military staff. It is also the intention, at a later date, that pay, pensions and personnel administrative elements of the recently formed Army Personnel Centre in Glasgow should come within the agency.

The agency proposal followed a feasibility study which concluded that personnel administration offered scope for significant harmonisation and, eventually, the development of an integrated tri-service computer system. Arrangements are in hand to contract a private sector partner under the Government's private finance initiative to deliver most of the services required of the agency. The partner would also be responsible for developing and operating new computer systems to improve efficiency, whilst at the same time shouldering much of the business risk involved.

AFPAA has developed a comprehensive set of performance indicators, including measures to monitor the quality, timeliness and efficiency of its outputs. The chief executive has been set the following targets for the agency's first full year:

1. *Pay, allowances and pensions payments.*

Whilst making 100 per cent. of payments of pay, allowances and pensions by the due date, the number of errors per 1,000 payments not to exceed 10 for pay and allowances, and not to exceed five for pensions.

2. *Accuracy of personnel records and liabilities data.*

Determine measures to set base line of completeness and accuracy of the record of service.

3. *Currency of personnel records and liabilities data.*

Update all records within three days of receipt of valid input.

4. *Responsiveness.*

Resolve inquiries across all three services within 10 working days of receipt.

5. *Customer satisfaction.*

Develop systematic and objective methods of ensuring customer satisfaction, in consultation with the owner and customers.

6. *Private sector participation.*

Agree a private finance initiative service delivery contract with a private sector partner by July 1997, to provide significantly better value for money than the public sector comparator.

7. *Efficiency.*

Develop cost ratios and implement appropriate measures for benchmarking efficiency, in core personnel administration services.

Bett Review

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the results of his consideration of Sir Michael Bett's independent review of the armed forces manpower, career and remuneration structure; and if he will make a statement. [17294]

Mr. Soames: It is clearly essential that the armed forces have pay structures, allowances, and other terms and conditions of service that attract and retain people of the calibre and exceptional qualities that we need.

Our personnel policy must recognise and reflect the unique demands of service life, while at the same time taking account of the terms and conditions of service applicable to relevant civilian groups. We need to recruit and retain substantial numbers of high-quality men and women to ensure that the armed forces continue to be able to fulfil their operational commitments. We must also offer careers which are satisfying and rewarding. We can achieve those aims only if terms and conditions of service are right. We must also take account of modern practices in management and career planning. Since the independent review was published in April 1995, we have undertaken much further work on our policies.

Our plans are set out in an information document entitled "The Armed Forces of the Future—a Personnel Strategy". A copy is in the Library of the House.

We have decided to introduce pay ranges for all ranks, up to and including brigadier and its equivalent, underpinned by a new job evaluation system which we can use to allocate jobs to pay ranges. That will enable other ranks for the first time to progress through a pay range rather than be paid a spot rate. Everyone will have the opportunity to increase their earnings within their rank, in recognition of experience and qualifications, subject to satisfactory performance. This should be a welcome retention incentive.

Changes in the allowances payable to service personnel will allow us to target allowances more efficiently where they are most needed to assist recruitment and retention, and to compensate for the extra costs and disadvantages of service life. A longer separated service allowance will be introduced, targeted on those who serve long or frequent periods on operations, exercise or other training away from their base. The Government have accepted the Armed Forces Pay Review Body's recommendations of the rates of LSSA, and the consequential changes to the allowances currently paid for service in Northern Ireland and South Georgia. There will also be a new "get you home" allowance, providing a contribution to the cost of travelling home for those on detached duty or courses. These represent significant improvements for those personnel most disrupted by absences from their base and families.

The main offset for these proposals will be the withdrawal, from 1 April 1998, of the majority of leave travel warrants issued currently to all personnel. Only those in their first three years of service would retain the current entitlement. Beyond that, all single personnel with more than three but less than nine years' service would retain one leave warrant.

Detailed information about these plans is being widely disseminated within the three services. The plans have the whole-hearted support of the chiefs of staff.

Low Flying

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the conclusion of the study commissioned in co-operation with the United States and Canadian Governments into the feasibility of epidemiological research to examine a possible linkage between noise from low-flying military aircraft and adverse health effects. [17295]

Mr. Soames: The study, commissioned with the institute of sound and vibration research of the university of Southampton, as prime contractor, supported by the National Physical Laboratory and the Medical Research Council, was completed in December 1996. Because of the wide dispersion of military low flying, and the infrequency of exposure to noise from this source by the average person, the study concluded that it would not be practicable to carry out a meaningful epidemiological

study of the effects of noise from low flying military aircraft on the health of overflown populations. Statistical calculations suggested that an initial sample of at least 20,000 people would need to be included in any study population; however, in order to allow for confounding factors and uncertainties in the pattern of exposure, the size of the study population would have to be increased by a factor of between five and 10.

A comprehensive field validation study carried out in the Vale of Evesham found that the daily noise exposure in the most heavily over flown areas did not exceed that experienced by over a quarter of the population of England and Wales from general ambient noise. No individual aircraft event exceeded 120db(A) and the majority of events were below 100db(A). This reaffirms our belief that, although the restrictions placed on the heights, speeds and operating procedures of military aircraft are designed to ensure that noise levels on the ground do not exceed 125db(A), a level which research suggests provides a margin of safety to human hearing, in practice any exposure to noise from military low flying is likely to be significantly lower.

Copies of a composite document comprising reports by ISVR and the MCR, and an executive summary by the tri-national steering committee have been placed in the Library of the House.

My Department will continue to be involved in scientific research on noise and health. Should new research suggest a linkage between military low flying and adverse health effects, we will consider what changes to our aircraft operating procedures should be made. In the meantime, we firmly believe that they reflect the best available scientific and medical advice.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost to public funds of the attendance of *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department at meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland since December 1994; and if he will list the meetings of the Committee which (a) and (b) have attended, indicating the cost of attendance and the names of those who attended. [16569]

Mr. Lang: Ministers attend Scottish Grand Committee meetings as part of their normal parliamentary duties and officials do so as part of their normal departmental duties. Expenditure falling to my Department has been limited to travelling costs. I attended the Scottish Grand Committee meeting on 5 July 1996 in Dumfries and no officials from my Department were in attendance.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the comparative success of each English region in securing funding for regional selective assistance. [17192]

Mr. Greg Knight: Funding for RSA is held centrally by the Department but the appraisal of most applications and decisions on whether to offer support are taken by the relevant Government Office against criteria which are common to all regions. There is no pre-set allocation of RSA funds between regions. The amount of RSA offered in each region depends on the applications received and whether these meet the scheme criteria. Data for individual regions is published by HMSO in the annual report on the Industrial Development Act 1982.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *278*, what criteria for new lenders to the loan guarantee scheme have been agreed; on what date he will be writing to potential lenders; and if he will list the potential lenders. [16940]

Mr. Page: The criteria to be used in assessing potential lenders are:

- should have the expertise, experience and capacity to appraise technology based commercial borrowing proposals from both technical and commercial viewpoints;
- should have a proven track record (ideally of several years experience) of successful lending to small businesses;
- could make worthwhile use of the scheme;
- is reputable;
- should have effective appraisal techniques;
- should have well established procedures in operation to monitor and review borrowers;
- should add something extra to the range of services already available.

We are aiming to write to all potential lenders by early March.

It is not appropriate to list potential lenders since interest in lending under the scheme is commercially confidential to the firms concerned.

Limited Liability Partnership Legislation

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress his Department has made with developing proposals for limited liability partnership legislation in the United Kingdom. [17296]

Mr. Lang: I am pleased to announce that the Government are publishing today a consultation paper, "Limited Liability Partnership: A New Form of Business Association for Professions". The consultation paper sets out detailed proposals for legislation to create a new structure for professional businesses, in line with the Government's commitment to maintain a competitive and up-to-date legal framework for business in the United Kingdom.

The publication of the consultation paper today follows my announcement on 7 November in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), *Official Report*, column *700*, that the Government intended to bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity to make limited liability partnership available to regulated professions in the UK, subject to appropriate safeguards to protect the interests of those doing business with the limited liability partnership. I said then that we would publish our proposals before Easter.

The proposals are being made in response to the concerns of many in the professions that, under present partnership law in the UK, the personal assets of the

active members of the partnership are at risk from the business decisions of other partners even though, in modern business conditions, it may well be impossible for partners even to know all the other partners.

Limited liability partnership is already widely available in the USA and in an increasing number of other countries. It should be available in the UK too: the present gap in our legal framework risks undermining the confidence of businesses which play a key role in the success of the UK economy.

The proposals are designed to retain the tried and tested benefits of partnership—flexibility of its capital requirements, the flexibility and privacy of its internal constitution, its avoidance of the separation of ownership and management, and the way in which earning are taxed—while protecting individual members against unlimited personal liability for matters in which they are not personally at fault. A robust package of safeguards is proposed to protect the interests of those dealing with the partnership, including the public disclosure of information about the partnership and safeguards in the case of insolvency.

The closing date for responses to the consultation is 16 May 1997. I look forward to receiving the views of the professions, those dealing with them and business generally.

Export Controls

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the results of the public consultation on strategic export controls were; and when he will announce what action the Government will be taking in response to the consultation. [17297]

Mr. Lang: I am placing copies of the responses received to the consultative document on strategic export controls (Cm 3349), except where confidentiality has been requested in the Libraries of both Houses. I am also placing copies in the library of my Department where members of the public can arrange to see them if they wish.

My Department, in consultation with other Departments, is considering the way forward on strategic export controls, taking account of the responses received to the consultation. Where relevant, the conclusions of the committee established in November to inquire into the controls and procedures relating to arms trafficking, set out in the reply given on 21 January by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will also be taken into account.

Given the complexity of the subject some further, more detailed consultation with directly interested parties is likely to be needed in developing any proposed changes to strategic export controls. An announcement will be made in due course.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16749]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Non-departmental public bodies are established to operate at arm's length from Government, often under specific statutory powers. The NDPB's governing board is responsible for the management and control of the body's functions.

My Department is responsible for monitoring the performance of the NDPBs it sponsors, and for ensuring that they operate within the framework of controls set out in the Treasury and Cabinet Office guidance, "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments."

Guidance on best practice on the procurement of external consultants is contained in the efficiency unit scrutiny report, "The Government's Use of External Consultants", which is available to all the Department's NDPBs.

Water Cannons (Export Licences)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each of the last five years the number of export licences granted for the sale of water cannons, indicating in each case, the recipient country. [9990]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 January 1997]:* Licences identified from computer records as issued for the export of water cannon and equipment incorporating water cannon during the last five years are as follows.

Year	*Number of licences*	*Destination*	*Number of water cannon*
1992	1	Mauritius	1
	1	Venezuela	40
1994	1	Indonesia	3
1995	2	Indonesia	6
1996	1	Indonesia	7
	1	Ghana	4

Computer records cannot always identify individual items on an export licence application if they are part of a larger export package. Further research could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Mid Kent Water

Dr. Howells: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *641*, what representations his Department received from parties to the proposed acquisition of Mid Kent Holdings by Companie Générale des Eaux and SAUR Water Services; in what form such representations were made; to whom they were made; and at what stage of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation they were made. [15200]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 12 February 1997]:* In this case, after the MMC had begun its inquiry into the proposed merger, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was required under the provisions of the Water Industry Act 1991 to consider whether it appeared to him that it was or might be the fact that an actual merger had already taken place and hence whether the terms of the reference should be varied. In reaching his decision to vary the reference, which was

announced on 13 September 1996, my right hon. Friend considered the views of General Utilities, Mid Kent Holdings and SAUR Water Services.

In addition, the Department received various representations about the merger either directly from the companies or attached to correspondence from hon. Members or members of the public. It is not my right hon. Friend's policy to make public further details concerning an individual merger case once the report describing the results of the thorough inquiry conducted by the MMC has been published and my right hon. Friend's decision has been announced.

Mergers

Dr. Howells: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *325*, if he will define the exceptional circumstances in which Ministers in his Department receive representations from companies with a direct interest in a Monopolies and Mergers Commission merger report prior to a decision being made on the report; and if any such exceptions have been made during the last 18 months, indicating in which cases and for what reasons. [15199]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 12 February 1997]:* It is clearly not possible to define in advance exceptional circumstances. However, very occasionally, one of the parties to a merger may, for example, inform the Department of a significant change of circumstances in the market under examination that has occurred after the MMC has reported and Ministers would not be able properly to reach a decision without taking that new information into account.

It is not my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade's policy to make public further details concerning an individual merger case once the report describing the results of the thorough inquiry conducted by the MMC has been published and my right hon. Friend's decision has been announced.

Millennium Club

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many times over the last three years, he has addressed the Millennium Club in his official capacity; and if he will list the names of those present and the companies they represented on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [15695]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* I have not addressed the Millennium Club in my official capacity.

Mr. Alan Lewis

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his intervention with the Russian Deputy Prime Minister on behalf of Mr. Alan Lewis during the period when civil proceedings in the Russian courts were in progress. [15662]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* I wrote to Russian Deputy Prime Ministers Bolshakov and Kazakov on 28 June 1996 following up a meeting of the UK—Russia Steering Committee on Trade and Investment which I had co-chaired with Mr. Bolshakov the previous month. The letter addressed the uncertainties that investors faced in Russia and our shared aim to create there an attractive investment climate, and referred to Illingworth Morris as an example.

I also wrote to Mr. Bolshakov on 4 December 1996 concerning negotiations involving other companies. Correspondence of this type is normally regarded as commercially confidential.

Throughout, all correspondence and contact with the Russian Government were based wholly on the advice of officials in my Department and at the British Embassy in Moscow. Neither I nor any other Minister or official corresponded with the Chief Justice of the Russian High Arbitration court over this case.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the occasions on which he has met Mr. Alan Lewis in an official capacity; and what subjects were discussed on each occasion. [15663]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* In my official capacity as President of the Board of Trade I have met Mr. Lewis once. We discussed his company's business interests.

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what factors led him to write to the Russian Deputy Prime Minister on behalf of Illingworth Morris about negotiations in which the company was involved in Russia; if he will place copies of the relevant correspondence in the Library; in what other cases he has written to Russian Ministers concerning individual company negotiations in Russia; and if he will make a statement. [15697]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 13 February 1997]:* I wrote to Russian Deputy Prime Ministers Bolshakov and Kazakov on 28 June 1996 following up a meeting of the UK-Russia Steering Committee on Trade and Investment which I had co-chaired with Mr. Bolshakov the previous month. The letter addressed the uncertainties that investors faced in Russia and our shared aim to create there an attractive investment climate, and referred to Illingworth Morris as an example.

I also wrote to Mr. Bolshakov on 4 December 1996 concerning negotiations involving other companies.

Correspondence of this type is normally regarded as commercially confidential.

Throughout, all correspondence and contacts with the Russian Government were based wholly on the advice of officials in my Department and at the British Embassy in Moscow.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the ministerial visits made to each CIS country since 1992. [15734]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Listed are DTI ministerial visits to CIS countries since 1992:

	Country visited	*Date*
Mr. Heseltine	Azerbaijan and Russia	September 1992
Mr. Eggar	Kazakhstan	September 1993
Mr. Eggar	Uzbekistan	May 1994

	Country visited	Date
Mr. Eggar	Turkmenistan	February 1995
Mr. Eggar	Azerbaijan and Georgia	May 1995
Mr. Eggar	Russia	September 1995
Lord Goschen—(Transport Minister, but let a DTI Mission)	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan	September 1995
Mr. Lang	Russia	May 1996
Mr. Eggar	Azerbaijan and Georgia	June 1996
Lord Goschen—(Transport Minister but led a DTI Mission)	Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia	September/October 1996
Lord Fraser	Azerbaijan	January 1997

Airbus

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total expenditure in launch aid for the Airbus A320; and how much of this has so far been recouped. [15854]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 18 February 1997]:* Total launch aid of £249.3 million was granted for the Airbus A320. A total of £250.2 million has so far been received in repayment. Repayment, including a rate of return, is made by a levy on sales.

TRANSPORT

British Rail Subsidiaries

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the gross proceeds of sales of former subsidiaries of British Rail in 1996–97. [15399]

Mr. Watts: Total gross proceeds of companies, which were previously owned by British Rail and which have been sold in the current financial year pursuant to the Railways Act 1993, are £2.13 billion. This sum includes gross proceeds of £1.93 billion from the sale of Railtrack; deferred payments; dividends of some £14 million paid before the sales this year of BR infrastructure companies; and gross proceeds of the following companies which were sold since my answer to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) of 27 November 1996, *Official Report,* columns *273–76.*

Company	Purchaser	Gross proceeds £ million	Sale date
Scientifics Ltd.	Atesta Group Ltd.	1.8	9 December 1996
BR Research Ltd.	AEA Technology PLC	10.752	19 December 1996
Nationwide Fire Services	Serco Ltd.	[1]0.106	6 January 1997
BR Business Systems	Sema Group UK Ltd.	27.0	31 January 1997
National Railway Supplies Ltd.	Gresty Supplies Ltd. (MBO)	31.026	31 January 1997
Rail Operational Research Ltd.	BR Projects Ltd. (an associate company of General Practice Investment Corp Ltd.)	1.5	4 February 1997

[1] Excludes collection of outstanding debts.

M6/M61 Junction Signs

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what decision he has reached concerning the inclusion of Bolton on the M6/M61 junction signs; and if he will make a statement. [15712]

Mr. Watts: I am pleased to say that the Highways Agency has prepared a design for the signs on the four gantries involved at the M6/M61 junction which will allow the addition of Bolton. This work will be completed in March.

Rail Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the causes of train delays and cancellations that are *(a)* recorded and *(b)* not recorded in the four-weekly track record on punctuality and reliability under the terms of the citizens charter. [15964]

Mr. Watts: Delays or cancellations caused by circumstances outside the control of the rail industry, such as vandalism, suicides or terrorist threats, are excluded from the passengers charger statistics. Services provided on certain days are also excluded: these are Sundays—except for Gatwick express and Island line—public holidays; and days when bus services are substituted, for example during engineering works, or when no effective service can be provided and season tickets are extended or refunded.

Except where exclusions apply, the services included in passengers charter punctuality and reliability results are as follows. For punctuality:

London commuter train companies (formerly Network SouthEast)—Mondays to Fridays only, trains arriving at London termini between 07.00 and 10.00 and trains departing from London between 16.00 and 19.00. Trains are punctual if they arrive at their destination within four minutes 59 seconds of the scheduled time.

InterCity train companies—all trains Monday to Saturday. Trains are punctual if they arrive at their destination within nine minutes 59 seconds of the scheduled time.

Other train companies (ex Regional Railways)—all trains Monday to Saturday. trains are punctual if they arrive at their destination within 4 minutes 59 seconds for short distance routes and 9 minutes 59 seconds for long distance routes.

Gatwick express—all trains Monday to Sunday. Trains are punctual if they arrive at their destination within 4 minutes 59 seconds of the scheduled time.

For reliability:

the number of trains scheduled to run in the published timetable, including any emergency timetable. A train is counted as run if it has completed at least 50 per cent. of its scheduled route mileage.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of a timetabled journey under the passengers charter a train must complete to count as *(a)* a cancellation and *(b)* a train run; and if these criteria apply to all train operating companies. [15965]

Mr. Watts: For passengers charter purposes, a train is counted as cancelled if it fails to complete at least 50 per cent. of its scheduled route mileage. A train would be counted as run if it had completed at least 50 per cent. of

its scheduled route mileage. These criteria apply to all train operating companies and have not changed since 1992.

Isle of Sheppey (Bridge)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the proposal for a new Swale bridge to the Isle of Sheppey; what provision has been made for this project in his Department's future programme; and what priority has been accorded to the project. [16025]

Mr. Watts: Proposals for a second crossing of the Swale to the Isle of Sheppey are part of the A249 Iwade-Queenborough improvement scheme. Draft line and side roads orders under the Highways Act 1980 were published for the scheme on 23 January. Economic, environmental and engineering assessments were carried out as part of that process. The economic appraisal involved the usual cost-benefit methodology applied to all major trunk road improvement proposals. The environmental assessment, in accordance with EC regulations, considered visual impact—including consulting Royal Fine Arts Commission—the effect on the local ecology, as well as more general environmental impacts.

The results of this assessment were also published in an environmental statement on 23 January and placed on deposit locally for public inspection. The engineering assessment, comprised value management and value engineering as well as checks to ensure that the proposals comply with our national standards.

This scheme has been given priority to progress it to draft order stage. Its future progress will depend upon the successful completion of the remaining statutory procedures.

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16180]

Mr. Bowis: The extensive information requested concerning the private employment agencies used by my Department and its agencies will take some time to assemble. I shall write to the hon. Member when I have further details and place a copy of the information in the Library.

London Transport Finance

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* total grants, *(b)* core business capital grants, *(c)* new lines and extensions capital grants and *(d)* revenue support grants, excluding the docklands light railway, awarded to London Transport in each year since 1978; and what is the planned expenditure for each year between 1996–97 and 1999–2000 in (i) cash prices and (ii) 1996–97 prices. [16027]

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is set out in the following tables.

At cash prices £ million

Year	*Core business capital grant*	*Core business revenue support grant*	*New lines and extensions capital grant*	*Total grant*
1978	69	51	—	120
1979	106	51	—	157
1980	138	80	—	218
1981	135	82	—	217
1982	190	123	—	313
1983	167	175	—	342
1984–85[1]	137	186	—	323
1985–86	182	125	—	307
1986–87	224	66	—	290
1987–88	159	44	—	203
1988–89	150	20	—	170
1989–90	204	44	—	248
1990–91	366	74	44	484
1991–92	405	103	65	573
1992–93	546	254	83	883
1993–94	506	66	120	692
1994–95[2]	363	10	413	786
1995–96	443	—	461	904
1996–97[3,4,5]	Breakdown of figures not yet available for these years			973
1997–98[4,5,6]				701
1998–99[4,5,6]				352
1999–2000[5,6]				163

[1] 15 months accounting period.

[2] In addition to grant in 1994–95 LT benefitted substantially from proceeds from the sale of the subsidiaries of London Buses Ltd.

[3] 1996–97 outturn figure subject to end-year flexibility arrangements.

[4] Apportionment of grant between LT core business and the JLE will be determined by LT in the light of emerging requirements.

[5] Includes Croydon Tramlink.

[6] £30 million grant carried forward from 1995–96 not yet allocated to a particular year.

At 1996–97 prices:

Year	Core business capital grant	Core business revenue support grant	New lines and extensions capital grant	Total grant
1978	211	156	—	367
1979	278	134	—	412
1980	306	177	—	483
1981	273	165	—	438
1982	358	232	—	590
1983	301	315	—	616
1984–85[1]	235	319	—	554
1985–86	296	203	—	499
1986–87	354	104	—	458
1987–88	238	66	—	304
1988–89	211	28	—	239
1989–90	268	58	—	326
1990–91	445	90	54	589
1991–92	463	118	74	655
1992–93	599	279	91	969
1993–94	540	70	128	738
1994–95[2]	380	10	433	823
1995–96	453	—	471	924
1996–97[3 4 5]	Breakdown of figures not yet available for these years			973
1997–98[4 5 6]				687
1998–99[4 5 6]				338
1999–2000[3 6]				154

[1] 15 months accounting period.
[2] In addition to grant in 1994–95 LT benefitted substantially from proceeds from the sale of the subsidiaries of London Buses Ltd.
[3] 1996–97 outturn figure subject to end-year flexibility arrangements.
[4] Apportionment of grant between LT core business and the JLE will be determined by LT in the light of emerging requirements.
[5] Includes Croydon Tramlink.
[6] £30 million grant carried forward from 1995–96 not yet allocated to a particular year.

Railtrack

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people Railtrack employed *(a)* in total, *(b)* in its Intercity East Coast zone and *(c)* in its regional Railways North East zone at the time of its share flotation. [16643]

Mr. Watts: As detailed in the prospectus, as at 31 March 1996, Railtrack had approximately 11,500 employees. The information is not available by zone.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the Government's estimate of the value of Railtrack's *(a)* capital assets, including stations, light maintenance depots, arch accommodations and commercial property, investment property, track, bridges, tunnels, signalling systems and other land and capital assets and *(b)* annual commercial turnover (i) in total, (ii) in the Intercity East Coast zone and (iii) in the regional Railways North East zone at the time of the share flotation. [16642]

Mr. Watts: The historical cost of Railtrack's capital assets as described in the sale prospectus was £5,915 million as at 31 March 1994 and £6,492 at 31 March 1995 at current cost. The annual turnover for the year ended 31 March 1995 again as stated in the prospectus was £2,275 million and for the six months ended 30 September 1995 £1,139 million. The information is not available broken down by zone.

South West Trains

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the compliance of South West Trains with its franchise agreement; what penalties it is subject to for non-compliance with its franchise agreement; and what liabilities it has incurred to date. [16914]

Mr. Watts: Compliance with franchise agreements is a matter for the franchising director. He has a range of options open to him to ensure that franchisees observe the terms of their agreements with him. In the case of South West Trains, the franchisee will be penalised financially for peak period cancellations he has made following the introduction of revised working arrangements for drivers. South West Trains has introduced a temporary timetable to minimise disruption to passengers, especially peak period services. Penalties are of the order of £600 per peak period cancellation.

London Underground (Disabled People)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that *(a)* existing London underground stations and *(b)* London underground stations which are currently under construction are accessible for disabled people. [16521]

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for London Underground. I understand that its policy is to maintain and improve existing levels of access for disabled passengers where practicable and to incorporate improved accessibility into all new and rebuilt trains, new lines and extensions and station redevelopments. For example, the Jubilee line extension, when completed, will be fully accessible to wheelchair users.

More generally, access to stations and other public transport stations and terminals is covered by the provisions of part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which provides for the removal of physical barriers to access where that is deemed reasonable. The

Government have consulted on the timetable for implementation of those provisions and an announcement will be made shortly.

Metrolink

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce a decision in relation to the outcome of the public inquiry into the extension of Metrolink into the Wythenshawe constituency; if the Minister from his Department to be present will make a statement about this at the meeting of the North West Regional Association on 24 February; and if he will make a statement. [16773]

Mr. Watts: The Secretary of State's decision on the application by the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive for the Greater Manchester (LRTS) (Airport Extension) Order is expected shortly. If the decision is announced before the meeting of the Regional Annual Consultative Committee on 24 February, that meeting would provide an opportunity for any questions about the decision to be raised.

Driving Standards Agency

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many driving examiners employed by the Driving Standards Agency have worked only one day in any one month period in the last 12 months; and on how many occasions a driving examiner employed by the Driving Standards Agency worked only one day in a month in the last 12 months. [16845]

Mr. Bowis: During 1996, all contract examiners were employed to the maximum of their guaranteed work under the terms of their particular contract. The reduced use of contract examiners started in December 1996 in response to falling demand for tests. Twenty contract examiners were employed for only one day in January 1997.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16747]

Mr. Bowis: Provision for all non-departmental public bodies is reviewed regularly and before annual budgets are set including expenditure on consultants. Audited accounts are published for each of these bodies.

British Rail Property Board

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what residual liabilities will need to be met through payment of grant in aid after the sale of the British Rail Property Board; [16502]

(2) what provisions have been made in respect of the residual liabilities of British Rail Property Board following its sale. [16501]

Mr. Watts: No property assets or liabilities are to be included in the sale of the British Rail Property Board, which would become a property management business. No new liabilities would arise from its sale. Existing liabilities would remain with the BR board and provision would be made in the BR board's annual report and accounts in the usual way.

Royal Train

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what rules govern whether a journey involving the use of the royal train by a member of the royal family is official or private. [16891]

Mr. Watts: A journey by a member of the royal family involving the use of the royal train is considered to be official if it is undertaken in pursuance of royal duties.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis repayments by members of the royal family are calculated for private use of the royal train. [16889]

Mr. Watts: Members of the royal family do not make private use of the royal train.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners' Behaviour (Diet)

7. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department *(a)* has commissioned and *(b)* plans to commission into the effects of diet on prisoners' behaviour; and if he will make a statement. [15284]

Miss Widdecombe: We have not commissioned such research, but we have agreed to facilitate the nutritional rehabilitation project being run by Natural Justice Ltd. in Aylesbury young offender institution.

Young Offender Institution (Colchester)

12. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the first offenders to arrive at the new young offender institution in Colchester and if he will make a statement. [15292]

Miss Widdecombe: The first intake of young offenders arrived at Colchester young offender institution today.

Closed Circuit Television

13. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department has taken to increase the number of closed circuit television schemes. [15294]

Mr. Maclean: We will be investing more than £50 million in closed circuit television, funding more than 10,000 new cameras; 365 winning local partnerships have already been awarded more than £22 million. We will be announcing the results of the third competition, with another £15 million, very soon.

17. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many CCTV cameras have been installed under the Government's CCTV challenge competitions in 1995 and 1996. [15302]

Mr. Maclean: If all the winning schemes go ahead as planned, we estimate that more than 4,000 closed circuit television cameras will be installed with the assistance of funding from the first two challenge competitions.

21. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department has taken to increase the number of closed circuit television schemes. [15302]

Mr. Maclean: We will be investing more than £50 million in closed circuit television through our CCTV challenge competitions; 365 winning local partnerships have already been awarded more than £22 million in the first two competitions. We will be announcing the results of the third competition, with another £15 million, very soon.

Crime Statistics

14. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces experienced a fall in their recorded crime figures in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* the 12 months to June 1996. [15295]

Mr. Maclean: For both periods, the majority of police forces recorded falls in crime. In the 12 months to June 1996, 24 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales recorded decreases. For 1995, 35 forces recorded decreases.

Prisoners (Handcuffing)

15. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the guidelines issued to the Prison Service concerning the handcuffing of prisoners receiving hospital or hospice treatment. [15296]

Miss Widdecombe: On 18 January 1996, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made a statement to the House setting out policy on the handcuffing of prisoners receiving medical or antenatal treatment or giving birth outside the prison. The following day, the director of security and programmes issued an internal instruction announcing the new arrangements.

The Prison Service has now issued further internal instructions giving more detailed guidance. These form part of the "Manual on Security", copies of which are held in the Library.

Warwickshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority

16. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received concerning Warwickshire fire and civil defence authority. [15297]

Mr. Sackville: Representations have been received from one hon. Member about fire service funding. In addition, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State with responsibility for the fire service, met a deputation in November to discuss the fire standard spending assessment distributional formula.

Drug Trafficking and Dealing

19. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed with the Director General of the National Criminal Intelligence Service further initiatives to counter illegal drug trafficking and dealing. [15300]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has not had such discussions recently with the Director General of the National Criminal Intelligence Service. However, the director general and his staff have regular contacts with Ministers and officials on a wide range of issues concerning serious and organised crime.

Asylum Seekers

20. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are currently detained in prisons and in detention centres. [15301]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 31 January 1997, there were a total of 768 persons whose detention resulted solely from powers conferred by schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971 and who had sought asylum at some stage.

Mobile Phones (Police Investigation)

22. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of mobile phones in police investigations. [15303]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's reply of 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *215–16*.

Religious Cults

23. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance his Department provides to the families of members of religious cults. [15305]

Mr. Sackville: The Department provides advice about the legal position and about other sources of help, including organisations which offer information and counselling.

Prosecutions

24. **Mr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proportion of recorded crime that resulted in prosecutions in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the latest period for which figures are available. [15306]

Mr. Maclean: The latest information relates to 1995 and indicates that 10 per cent. of recorded offences against individuals and their property resulted in a prosecution. Information for 1979 is not available in the form requested and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Security Breaches (Prisons)

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that every prison has a suitable emergency procedure to follow in the event of a breach of security by prisoners. [15299]

Miss Widdecombe: Every prison establishment is required to have and maintain contingency plans for incidents that may occur within it, including breaches of security by prisoners.

Drugs Seizures

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many seizures of *(a)* soft drugs and *(b)* hard drugs have been made from private dwellings in each of the past three years; what was the estimated street value of the seizures in each case; and if he will make a statement. [15461]

Mr. Maclean: No distinction is made between "soft" and "hard" drugs in drugs seizure statistics. National statistics on drug seizures are produced on the basis of class and type of drug. Seizure figures for each class for 1993, 1994 and 1995 are as follows:

	1993	*1994*	*1995*
Class A	12,102	13,876	17,344
Class B	77,068	95,997	101,445
Class C	1,129	1,627	1,867

Figures for 1996 are not yet available.

Information relating to the place where drugs have been seized has not been collected at a national level since 1992. The street values of drugs seized are also not collected. Although they provide a useful operational tool for police officers, they are too subjective and liable to fluctuation to be included in national statistics.

Holocaust Denial

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reconsider his response to recent proposals for legislation to make holocaust denial an offence. [15466]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Government's position on holocaust denial is well known and we have no plans to change it.

Prison Inspectorate Reports

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 February, *Official Report*, column *554*, if he will publish a list showing which prison each of 25 reports awaiting publication refer to; and how long each report has been awaiting publication. [14862]

Miss Widdecombe: The 25 establishments for which, at 4 February, an inspection report had been received from Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons but had not yet been published, and the date on which the report was received from the inspectorate by my right hon. and learned Friend, is set out in the table:

Establishment	*Date inspection report was received by the Home Secretary*
Acklington	16 December 1996
Albany	22 October 1996
Belmarsh	17 December 1996
Channings Wood	22 October 1996
Chelmsford	16 December 1996
Dartmoor	29 August 1996
Dover	7 October 1996
Eastwood Park	6 January 1997
Everthorpe	14 November 1996
Featherstone	15 August 1996
Gloucester	22 October 1996
Guys Marsh	29 November 1996
Hatfield	8 October 1996
Holloway	14 August 1996
Lancaster Castle	18 November 1996
Low Newton	22 October 1996
Onley	19 June 1996
Portland	8 October 1996
Ranby	15 August 1996
Risley	3 September 1996
Shepton Mallet	6 November 1996
Usk/Prescoed	14 November 1996
The Verne	15 August 1996
Whitemoor	29 November 1996
Wormwood Scrubs	31 October 1996

The reports of the inspections of Portland and Hatfield were published on 13 February and 17 February respectively and those of four establishments, Guys Marsh, Holloway, Low Newton and Risley, will be published on 21 February.

The reports of the inspections of the following 10 establishments are expected to be published during February and March: Channings Wood, Dartmoor, Dover, Featherstone, Gloucester, Lancaster Castle, Onley, Ranby, The Verne and Wormwood Scrubs.

The remaining nine reports are under consideration. They will be published as soon as possible, but action in response to the recommendations made in an inspection report does not wait until publication of the report.

Prisoners (Unlocked Periods)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average amount of time prisoners spent unlocked *(a)* for each prison, *(b)* for each prison type and *(c)* for the whole Prison Service, (i) for each month since January 1996 and (ii) for each year since 1989–90. [15976]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking for the average amount of time prisoners spent unlocked (a) for each prison, (b) for each prison type and (c) for the whole Prison Service, (i) for each month since January 1996 and (ii) for each year since 1989–90.

Tables giving details of the information you requested have been placed in the Library. Time out of cell figures are not available for individual prisons prior to April 1994 so the yearly figures you requested are for April 1994 and April 1995 only.

Prisoners (Employment)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list *(a)* the number of employment places provided by Prison Service laundries and *(b)* the number of prisoner hours spent working in Prison Service laundries in each year since 1989–90. [15974]

(2) if he will list *(a)* the number of employment places, *(b)* the total net cost of these employment places offered by Prison Service industries and farms and *(c)* the total number of hours of inmate occupation provided by these places in each year since 1989–90; [15972]

(3) if he will list *(a)* the number of inmates and *(b)* the number of hours spent by inmates working directly for the private sector on a subcontract basis in each year since 1989–90. [15973]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your three recent Questions about the employment of prisoners.

The attached tables detail the information you requested.

The figures provided are from the earliest records available which, with the exception of the information for private sector work, exclude the period 1989–90. Figures provided for the current year are estimated rather than actual. Statistics relating to private sector work undertaken in prisons are not yet available for the period 1996–97.

Year	*Number of employment places*	*Net hours of work undertaken within Prison Service laundries*
1990–91	988	1,061,000
1991–92	1,090	1,040,000
1992–93	1,051	1,050,000
1993–94	1,053	960,000
1994–95	982	1,090,000
1995–96	984	1,080,000
1996–97[1]	906	976,000

[1] Only estimated figures are available for the current year.

Year	*Number of employment places*	*Net cost of employment places £*	*Number of hours of inmate occupation*
1991–92	11,003	26,107,000	11,553,150
1992–93	10,172	28,550,000	10,680,600
1993–94	10,024	27,748,000	10,625,440
1994–95	9,250	27,327,000	10,175,000
1995–96	9,626	27,369,000	10,444,210
1996–97[1]	10,320	29,711,000	11,868,000

[1] Only estimated figures are available for the current year.

Year	*Number of inmates*	*Number of hours spent by inmates working directly for the private sector on a sub-contract basis*
1989–90	2,537	1,602,255
1990–91	2,142	1,465,637
1991–92	2,033	1,296,000
1992–93	1,806	1,387,058
1993–94	1,637	1,395,239
1994–95	1,646	1,416,024
1995–96[1]	1,876	1,587,917

Figures are not available for 1996–97.

[1] Only estimated figures are available for this period.

Minimum Age Requirements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the minimum age requirements enforced by his Department. [15916]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office is responsible for legislation which sets various minimum age requirements covering firearms, gambling, liquor, sexual consent, supply of videos, access to cinemas and other matters, marriage, elections, nationality and aspects of the criminal law relating to juveniles. Readily available information on existing statutory provisions is set out in the table.

In each case, criminal offences are not themselves enforced by the Home Office.

Subject	*Age*	*Details of legal requirement*
Firearms	17	Minimum age under the Firearms Acts to purchase or hire a rifle, pistol, revolver, high-powered air gun, shotgun or airgun or ammunition for such a firearm; or to have an air weapon in a public place (with various exceptions).
	15	Minimum age under the Firearms Acts to have an assembled shotgun (unless with an adult) or to be given or lent a shotgun or ammunition for it.
	14	Minimum age under the Firearms Acts to possess or be given or lent a rifle, pistol, revolver or high-powered airgun (with various exceptions); to be granted a certificate by the police for such a firearm or to have (unless under the supervision of someone 21 or over), or be given, an air weapon or ammunition for it.
Gambling	18	Minimum age for participating in betting under the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963; for participating in casino gambling under the Gaming Act 1968; for participating in bingo under the Gaming Act 1968; and for using amusement arcades with all cash amusement-with-prizes machines under the Gaming Act 1968.
	16	Minimum age under the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963 for participating in football pools; and for participating in lotteries (excluding the National Lottery) under the Lotteries and Amusements Act 1976.
Liquor	18	Minimum age under the Liquor Licensing Act 1964 to purchase alcohol in bars and off-licences; work in a licensed bar (soon to be 16 under current deregulation measure) or to sell alcohol unsupervised in an off-licence.
	16	Minimum age under the Liquor Licensing Act 1964 to buy beer or cider with a meal.
	14	Minimum age under the Liquor Licensing Act 1964 to be in the bar of licensed premises, unless a children's certificate is in force.
Tobacco	16	Minimum age for buying tobacco or tobacco products under the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991.
Intoxicating substances	18	Under the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985, it is an offence to supply a substance to a person under 18 knowing or believing that the substance or its fumes are likely to be inhaled for the purposes of causing intoxication.
Street trading	17	Minimum age under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 and London Local Authorities Act 1990 for holding a street trading licence or street trading consent.

Subject	Age	Details of legal requirement
Pedlars	17	Minimum age for holding a pedlars certificate under the Pedlars Act 1871.
Hypnotism	18	Minimum age to be hypnotised as part of a public performance of hypnotism under the Hypnotism Act 1952.
Tattooing	18	Minimum age for having a tattoo under the Tattooing of Minors Act 1969.
Sexual consent	18	Minimum age for consent to male homosexual acts under the Sexual Offences Act 1967.
	16	Minimum age for consent to heterosexual acts under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 (and de facto to female homosexual acts).
Supply of video recordings	18/15/12	Under the Video Recordings Act, videos classified by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) as '12', '15', or '18' may not be supplied to people under those ages.
Access to cinema films	18/15/12	Under the Cinemas Act 1985, public cinemas must be under local authority licence which will require them to abide by age restrictions set in the classification certificates issued by the BBFC.
Access to licensed sex establishments	18	Minimum age for access to, working in or being granted a licence to run, a sex shop or cinema in local authority areas which have adopted the relevant powers of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.
Indecent photographs	16	Minimum age to be the subject of an indecent photograph (connected offences contained in the Protection of Children Act 1978 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988).
Marriage	18	Minimum age for marriage without the consent of a parent, parents or guardian under the Marriage Act 1949, as amended by the Family Law Act 1969.
	16	Minimum age for marriage under the Marriage Act 1949, as amended by the Family Law Act 1969.
Elections	21	Minimum age to stand for election at Parliamentary, European Parliamentary or local elections, under the Parliamentary Elections Act 1695, the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978 and the Local Government Act.
	18	Minimum age to vote in Parliamentary, European Parliamentary or local elections, under the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1978, amended by the Family Law Reform Act 1969.
Criminal law and penalties	10	Age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales. (The jurisdiction of the youth court covers 10–17 year olds, though a juvenile may appear in the adult Magistrates' Court if charged with an adult, or in the Crown Court if the offence with which he is charged warrants it.)
	10	Minimum age at which fines, compensation orders, bindovers, supervision orders, attendance centre orders and long term detention or detention during Her Majesty's pleasure become available, under the Children and Young Persons Acts 1933 and 1969, and the Criminal Justice Act 1991 (all as amended).
	12	Minimum age at which secure training order becomes available under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (maximum age 14). [Provisions not yet implemented.]
	15	Minimum age at which detention in a Young Offender's Institution becomes available under the Criminal Justice Act 1982, as amended.
	16	Minimum age at which probation orders, community service orders, combination orders or curfew orders become available under the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 and the Criminal Justice Act 1991.
	18	Minimum age at which custody for life becomes available under the Criminal Justice Act 1982, as amended.
Nationality	18	Minimum age for application for naturalisation as a British citizen and for renunciation of British citizenship by single person under the British Nationality Act 1981.
	10	Minimum age for application for registration as a British citizen by certain persons born in the UK who did not acquire citizenship at birth and for application for registration as a British citizen by a person born stateless outside the UK but resident in the UK for the past 5 years under the British Nationality Act 1981.

In addition, services for which the Home Office or its Agencies have responsibility set the following minimum age requirements for recruitment:

18 years for appointment as a firefighter (under the Fire Services (Appointment and Promotion) Regulations 1978);

22 years for appointment as a probation officer (under the Probation Rules 1984);

18 years and six months for appointment to a police force (under the Police Regulations 1995);

18 years for appointment as an immigration officer;

16 years for appointment as an assistant immigration officer, and

20 years for appointment as a prison officer (this requirement is under review).

Prisoners (Education)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many hours were spent in education by prisoners in each financial year since 1987–88; [15986]

(2) what estimates he has made of level of *(a)* numeracy, *(b)* literacy and *(c)* educational and vocational qualifications of prisoners on (i) first reception into prison and (ii) leaving prison; [15971]

(3) how much was paid by the Prison Service to local education authorities for teaching services in each financial year since 1985–86. [15987]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your three recent questions about education provision in prisons.

Information on the number of hours spent in education by prisoners is not available in the form requested. Since the contracting out of prison education in 1993 the number of hours spent in education by prisoners has been collected on a calendar year basis. The total number of prisoner hours spent in education was 9.2 million in 1994, the first full year under the contract arrangements, rising to 9.4 million in 1995. The predicted hours for 1996 are expected to be similar to 1995.

Education hours for the financial years before contracting out, as published in the Prison Service Annual Report, are set out in the attached table.

The Prison Service has made no specific estimates of the level of numeracy, literacy or educational and vocational qualifications of prisoners on first reception into prison and on leaving prison. Since 1 January this year, all prisoners are invited to take the Basic Skills Screening Test on reception into prison. This will provide comparative data on the level of literacy and numeracy among prisoners at the beginning and end of their sentences.

The amounts paid by the Prison Service to local education authorities for teaching services are set out in the attached table. Expenditure for 1993–94 onwards covers all education providers contracted to supply teaching services to prison establishments, not just local education authorities.

Education hours as published in the prison service annual report 1987–1993

	Hours
1987–88	5.56 million
1988–89	6.84 million
1989–90	7.75 million
1990–91	[1]Not available
1991–92	7.55 million
1992–93	7.57 million
April to December 1993	[2]Not available

[1] No figure published because the disturbances of that year made returns unreliable and incomplete.
[2] Developing and implementing the contracting-out process prevented figures from being collected for this period.

Payments by the prison service to local education authorities for teaching services in each financial year since 1985–86

Financial year	*£000s*
1985–86	10,849
1986–87	13,445
1987–88	14,984
1988–89	17,395
1989–90	20,235
1990–91	22,924
1991–92	26,245
1992–93	28,383
1993–94	27,628
1994–95	33,069
1995–96	33,573

Private Employment Agencies

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the private employment agencies used by his Department and its agencies in each of the last three years for which figures are available, indicating *(a)* the names of the agencies, *(b)* the numbers employed by the agencies in work for his Department, *(c)* the total cost to his Department of using employment agencies and the median cost paid to the agency per person recruited and *(d)* the average length of contract for persons recruited via such agencies. [16177]

Mr. Howard: The information recorded centrally is set out below. Additional information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The information given for the agencies has been provided by the Director General of the Prison Service and the chief executives of the Passport Agency, the Forensic Science Agency and the Fire Service College.

Home Office (excluding the Agencies)

(a) The following employment agencies have been used by central personnel units in the last three years:

Alfred Marks
Belle Recruitment
Brook Street
Excel Recruitment
Josephine Sammons
Kelly Services
Manpower
Michael Page Finance
Office Angels
Purcon
Reed Employment

Other agencies may have been used by local managers.

(b) This information is not recorded centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

(c) The total cost to central personnel units was approximately £260,000 in 1995 and £592,000 in 1996. Additional costs may have been incurred locally. The median cost paid to the agency per person recruited could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

(d) This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The majority of agency staff used are typists and secretaries who are booked on a weekly basis as required to provide cover for staff on sick leave, maternity leave or annual leave.

HM Prison Service

(a) The following employment agencies have been used by the central personnel unit in the last three years:

Account Temps
Adecco Alfred Marks
Badenoch and Clark
Capita
Certes
DBI Associates
Excel
Harrison Willis
Hays Accountancy Personnel
Inline KPG
Insight
Josephine Sammons
Manpower
Reed Employment
R. Page

(b) On 17 February 1997 the following agency staff were working in the Prison Service: 16 personal secretaries, four analysts, two administrative staff, 12 accounts clerks and 19 accountants. The total number of agency staff used in a year is not recorded.

(c) This information is not recorded centrally as costs are met from local budgets.

(d) This information is not recorded centrally as the arrangements in each case are made by local managers.

Passport Agency

(a) The following agencies have been used in the last two years:

Kelly Services
Manpower
Maureen Lynn RA

(b) 1995: two agency staff were used.

1996: four agency staff were used.

(c) The total cost was £2,603.67 in 1995 and £25,865.14 in 1996.

(d) Agency staff have been used for periods between 11 hours and eight months.

Forensic Science Service

(a) The following agencies have been used in the period 1993–94 to 1995–96:

Alfred Marks

Blue Arrow

Brook Street

Ecco

Excel

Harrison Willis

Lab Staff

Purcon

The information available in response to (b), (c) and (d) is as follows:

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*[1]
Average number of agency staff used	6	23	47
Total cost	£66,000	£254,000	£763,000
Average length of stay (in weeks)	31	30	42

[1] The establishment of the National DNA Database required a number of temporary posts at the outset which were subsequently converted to permanent positions.

Fire Service College

(a) The following agencies have been used in the period April 1995 to date:

Apex

Infomatch

Premier (CBR)

(b) This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

(c) The total cost in 1995–96 was £33,147 and the total cost to date in 1996–97 has been £60,157. These figures include VAT which is not recoverable as the Fire Service College has exempt status for VAT purposes.

(d) This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Open Prisons (Foreign Prisoners)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if convicted foreign nationals may be held in open prison. [16108]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about whether convicted foreign nationals may be held in open prisons.

Foreign nationals serving a sentence of imprisonment may not be held in open conditions if they are subject to removal from the United Kingdom at the end of the sentence under provisions of the Immigration Act 1971. This may be by reason of a court recommendation for deportation, a notice of intention to deport, a deportation order, a notice of illegal entry or a notice of refusal of leave to enter.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department has initiated to combat drugs misuse in north-west England. [16154]

Mr. Sackville: The Government's strategy for combating drugs misuse is aimed at reducing both the supply of and demand for illegal drugs. In support of this, 105 local drug action teams have been set up across the country; 16 of these are in the north-west. In addition, two Home Office drugs prevention teams, based in Liverpool and Salford, are working with local people and groups to find effective and lasting ways to prevent drugs misuse in the community.

Police and Customs activity in the region has achieved notable successes. A combined operation with Dutch police resulted in the seizure last October of cocaine valued at £75 million as well as considerable quantities of heroin and Ecstasy, and the breaking up of a major international drug trafficking organisation based in the north-west of England.

Prisons (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisons there were in Lancashire in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1979; [16152]

(2) how many prisoners there were in Lancashire in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1979. [16153]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the number of prisons and prisoners in Lancashire in 1996 compared with 1979.

The Information you requested is as follows:

	1979	*1996*
Number of prisons	6	8
Number of prisoners	1,786	3,046

Source:
Prison Service Annual Reports 1979 and 1995–96.
The figures for 1979 relate to the calendar year and for 1996 to the financial year 1995–96.
The daily average prison population for these two years was 42,220 and 51,664 respectively.

Crime Prevention (Lancashire)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policies his Department has initiated to help the police combat crime in the north-west of England since 1992. [16151]

Mr. Maclean: Our policies to combat crime, which benefit the north-west of England equally with the rest of the country, are to prevent offences from being committed in the first place, to help the police catch criminals, to ensure that, when caught, suspects are tried fairly and speedily, and to give the courts the powers they need to punish the guilty. This approach has involved major new

legislation: substantial changes in the criminal justice system, including the creation of new offences and the revision of penalties; the development of new measures on crime prevention; and the targeting of persistent offenders.

In the north-west, we have increased funding for the police—by £32.29 million in 1996–97 compared with 1995–96; we have provided nearly £2 million under the last two closed circuit television challenge competitions to assist with the installation of 36 schemes; and the single regeneration budget has provided nearly £14.5 million to successful round 1 bids in the area of crime and community safety.

Through partnership initiatives to combat crime and the steadfast work of the police, we have seen recorded crime fall in the north-west by more than 13 per cent. during the past three years for which figures are available.

Prison Medical Service

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the expenditure *(a)* in cash *(b)* at current prices and *(c)* per head of prison population incurred by the prison medical service in each year since 1990 on *(a)* mental illness research, *(b)* treatment by prescription medicines for (i) tranquillisers and (ii) anti-depressants and *(c)* treatment of drug abuses for each year. [15233]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about expenditure by the prison medical service each year since 1990 on mental illness research, prescription medicines for tranquillisers and anti-depressants and treatment of drug abuse.

We do not keep full central records on expenditure in the categories you ask, which could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However we estimate that around £400,000 has been spent on research relating to mental disorder in prisoners between 1990 and 1996.

Secure Accommodation (Kirklees)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will assist Kirklees metropolitan borough council in meeting the costs of providing secure accommodation for Glenn and John Howells. [16440]

Miss Widdecombe: The cost of accommodating juveniles remanded to local authority accommodation is entirely a matter for the local authority concerned.

Since the conviction and sentence of Glenn and John Howells on 12 February, the cost of their detention in secure local authority accommodation has been met by the Prison Service.

Mr. Oscar Okoye (Death)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the circumstances leading to the death of Mr. Oscar Okoye following his arrest in south London. [16414]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that Mr. Okoye was arrested on Friday 14 June 1996 for failing to give a specimen of breath, being suspected of driving while under the influence of alcohol and suspected assault. Mr. Okoye was seen by the custody officer at Streatham police station and then referred to a forensic medical examiner, who was concerned about the level of alcohol Mr. Okoye had consumed as he was a diabetic. Mr. Okoye was taken to St. George's hospital. He was then transferred to Atkinson Morely hospital, where a scan revealed a frontal haematoma. An operation was carried out on 18 June, which appeared at that stage to be successful. Mr. Okoye remained in hospital and died on 11 November from acute renal failure, diabetes militis and intracerebral haemorrhage.

Stalking

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his proposed timetable for implementing the provisions contained in the Protection from Harassment Bill. [16441]

Mr. Maclean: The exact timetable will depend on the progress of the Bill through Parliament. I expect that there will be a short period between Royal Assent and implementation of the provisions of the Bill in England and Wales to allow for the preparation of the courts, police and other relevant agencies. It is, however, the Government's intention to implement the provisions of this Bill as speedily as possible.

Special Secure Units

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the principal conclusions of the report by Sir Donald Acheson into the effects of the current special secure unit regime on prisoners' health; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [16350]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the conclusions of the report by Sir Donald Acheson into the effects of the current special secure unit (SSU) regime on prisoners' health.

Sir Donald's report contained the following recommendations:

1. Given the short duration of the present regime it is premature to come to a firm conclusion on its impact on prisoners' health. We therefore advise that the general health of prisoners detained in SSUs be reviewed at regular intervals, taking into account their degree of susceptibility to psychological symptoms.
2. A standard set of procedures applicable to all SSUs should be devised, circulated to all parties and enforced to ensure the most expeditious transfer of prisoners requiring emergency treatment to NHS hospitals.
3. SSUs should be provided with the same level of first aid and emergency aid equipment as other wings in the prison. Personnel trained in using the equipment should be on duty in the SSU at all times.
4. Prisoners should be held in SSUs for as short a period possible.

5. Prisoners should be informed when their cases are coming before the SSU committee and be given the opportunity to submit written representations. When feasible, an indication as to how long prisoners will be required to stay in the SSU system should be given.

6. Sentence planning should be introduced as with other long term prisoners.

7. More opportunities for mental stimulation and physical exercise should be provided, including the provision of meaningful activity.

8. It is the unanimous view of the group that in the interests of health prisoners in the SSUs should have access to open visits with members of their immediate family. We believe that it should be possible for the Prison Service to devise visits which prevent the passage of unauthorised items while at the same time retaining the advantages to the prisoners of physical contact possible only in open visits. Given the logistics involved in conducting secure open visits, it is for the Prison Service to determine their frequency and management.

9. Staff should be encouraged to form relationships with prisoners, yet remain sufficiently detached to maintain objectivity and resist being compromised.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date a system for three-monthly reviews of the health of individual prisoners in special secure units was introduced; who has been asked to conduct the reviews; how many prisoner shave been examined; and if he will make a statement. [16351]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the health reviews of prisoners in special secure units.

A revised version f the Operating Standards for special secure units was issued on 7 January 1997. The Standards incorporated the amendments made to reflect the recommendations of the Acheson Report, including the requirement for the health of prisoners to be reviewed every three months. The first reviews will take place next month. Reviews will be undertaken by medical officers at each establishment with outside assistance where appropriate.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints about the behaviour of sniffer dogs have been made by visitors to each of the prisons containing special secure units in each of the last four years; how many of these complaints were upheld; and what action was taken as a result. [16352]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of complaints made regarding the behaviour of sniffer dogs, by visitors to prisons containing special secure units.

The Prison Service has received two complaints in the last four years. These complaints were fully investigated and no evidence was found to support them, consequently no further action was taken.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if consultations between prisoners held in special secure units and their legal advisers remain subject to closed visit restrictions. [16353]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the closed visits policy for category A prisoners.

Prison Service policy requires that exceptional risk category A prisoners have closed visits except in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who made the decision that category A exceptional risk prisoners held in special secure units in 1994 did not have to have movement records in category A books within the discrete area of the special secure unit; and if this decision applied to all prisoners held in the special secure unit; [16545]

(2) what is his Department's definition of the discrete area of a special secure unit; [16546]

(3) if the Whitemoor escape trial prisoners had category A books before their arrival at HM prison Whitemoor; [16547]

(4) where the information, other than movement records, normally held in a category A book, was kept for those involved in the Whitemoor attempted escape; [16548]

(5) if he will place in the Library a sample of a category A book. [16549]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions relating to the decision that category A prisoners held in the special secure unit (SSU) at Whitemoor prison did not need to have their movements within the discrete area of the SSU recorded in category A books.

The governor of Whitemoor prison took the decision not to use category A books in the special secure unit, and this policy was applied to all prisoners in the SSU.

The special secure unit is discrete from the rest of the prison as it is a self-contained building within its own secure perimeter inside the main prison. It contains living and cell accommodation, an exercise area, activity area and a visits facility.

A category A book contains records of a prisoner's movement from one discrete area of the prison to another, signatures of the members of staff responsible for these movements and a photograph of the prisoner to facilitate identification. As these books were not used at Whitemoor this information was not recorded.

Prior to their transfers to Whitemoor prison, three of the Whitemoor escape trial prisoners were subject to category A books. The remaining three were held in special units which did not use such books.

I have arranged for a blank copy of a category A book to be placed in the Library. It is the same book as is used for prisoners on the escape list. I attach for your convenience a photocopy of the cover and of one of the pages (all of which are identical).

H.M. PRISON.....

PRISON No..... Date placed on Escape List.....

NAME..... Date removed from Escape List.....

LOCATION.....

OB001 (No. 1352) 3/94 XPT

Time						*Time*					
Date	*Place*	*From*	*To*	*Officer's signature*	*C.O.'s initials*	*Date*	*Place*	*From*	*To*	*Officer's signature*	*C.O.'s initials*

Roisin McAliskey (Strip Searches)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times Roisin McAliskey has been strip searched in each week since 20 November 1996. [16355]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of strip searches carried out on Ms Roisin McAliskey in each week since 20 November 1996.

The information you requested is as follows:

	Number
20 November to 26 November	1
27 November to 3 December	8
4 December to 10 December	10
11 December to 17 December	8
18 December to 24 December	10
25 December to 31 December	6
1 January to 7 January	6
8 January to 14 January	2
15 January to 21 January	8
22 January to 28 January	nil
29 January to 4 February	10
5 February to 11 February	nil
12 February to 16 February	6

Whitemoor Prison (Escape)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long each of the accused in the Whitemoor escape trial was held in a special secure unit. [16544]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how long each of the accused in the Whitemoor prison escape trial was held in a special secure unit.

The attached table shows how long the six prisoners involved in the attempted escape from the Whitemoor special secure unit have been held in a special secure unit.

Number	*Name*	*Date to special secure unit*
B83693	Liam McCotter	9 December 1988
BR3783	Paul Magee	16 June 1992
L48616	Gilbert McNamee	28 October 1987
MT2485	Liam O'Duibhir	7 December 1990
JA0023	Andrew Russell	15 April 1992
B75880	Peter Sherry	24 June 1986

Failed Prosecutions (Cleveland)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of Cleveland regarding the role played by his officers in the failure of the cases R *v.* Charrington and R *v.* Berriman; and if he will make a statement. [15286]

Mr. Maclean: No. The issues raised by these cases are matters for the relevant chief constables. It would not be appropriate for me to comment or intervene.

Consultants

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what monitoring takes place by his Department of the use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies. [16756]

Mr. Howard: The use of external consultants by non-departmental public bodies is not routinely monitored, since this would be incompatible with the delegated responsibility given to the governing bodies, but their use of consultants will often have been taken into account in the scrutiny of their annual budgets and business plans.

Prisons (Education and Work Opportunities)

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions the Minister responsible for prisons has had with *(a)* trade unions, *(b)* boards of visitors and *(c)* prison managers about education and work opportunities in prisons. [15304]

Miss Widdecombe: I have met trade union representatives and representatives of boards of visitors on a number of occasions. I have also had opportunities to discuss a range of issues including education and work opportunities with them during the 119 visits I have so far made to prison establishments. I meet prison managers frequently. I have made clear my support for the director general's guidance to governors that work and education are important elements of the prison regime.

Anti-terrorist Legislation

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Lord Lloyd of Berwick's recommendations in the report of his inquiry into legislation against terrorism. [17353]

Mr. Howard: Lord Lloyd has produced a thoughtful and comprehensive set of recommendations for new permanent counter-terrorism legislation covering the whole of the United Kingdom in the event of a lasting peace being established in Northern Ireland. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I are very grateful for this work, but in the continuing absence of a lasting peace we believe that it is too early to reach a firm view on possible fundamental legislative change. We hope that there will soon be a permanent cessation of violence which would enable us to look again at the possibility of providing a new legislative framework for combating terrorism.

The Government do, however, intend to bring forward in due course proposals to strengthen existing controls on terrorist finances, along the lines of Lord Lloyd's very helpful analysis. These proposals will include extending existing controls more widely to international terrorism.

Prison Service Funding

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much extra funding was made available, or expenditure incurred, in respect of implementing the recommendations for the Prison Service of *(a)* the Woodcock report and *(b)* the Learmont report, so far as separately identifiable for (i) 1994–95, (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97. [15511]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 February 1997]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Sir Ivan Lawrence, dated 20 February 1997:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how much extra funding was made available, or expenditure incurred, in respect of implementing the recommendations for the Prison Service of *(a)* the Woodcock Report and *(b)* the Learmont Report, so far as separately identifiable, for (i) 1994–95 (ii) 1995–96 and (iii) 1996–97.

The funding for 1996/97, the first year after the publication of the Learmont Report, includes money for both Woodcock and Learmont recommendations. It is not practical to separate spending on Woodcock and Learmont, as many of the measures funded by the 1996/97 provision implemented recommendations made in both reports. The figures are as follows:

£ million	*1994–95 Outturn*	*1995–96 Outturn*	*1996–97 Provision*
Current	0	[1]14.5	40.6
Capital	[2]3.3	[2]36.6	[2]39.2

[1] Estimated outturn: Our accounting system does not separately identify current expenditure on Woodcock.
[2] Does not include fees for design work etc.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

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Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

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Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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